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Seventy-third year

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New York

President: Mrs. Cordova Soria (Bolivia (Plurinational State of))

Members:

China	Mr. Lie Cheng
Côte d'Ivoire	Mr. Bieke
Equatorial Guinea	Ms. Avomo Sima
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France	Mrs. Philippe
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Poland	Mr. Zawieja
Russian Federation	Mrs. Gilmutdinova
Sweden	Mr. Lundkvist
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland . .	Ms. Fink
United States of America	Ms. Sutton

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

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The meeting resumed at 3.10 p.m.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representative of Costa Rica to participate in this meeting.

I wish to remind all speakers to limit their statements to no more than four minutes in order to enable the Council to carry out its work expeditiously. Delegations with lengthy statements are kindly requested to circulate the texts in writing and to deliver a condensed version when speaking in the Chamber.

I now give the floor to the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic.

Mr. Ja'afari (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): I am addressing the Council today as a main stakeholder in today's agenda item, given that the Arab Syrian Golan is under Israeli occupation. As such, allow me, Madam President, to deliver my statement in full.

It has been more than seven decades since Israel occupied the Palestinian territories and unleashed the tragedy and misery of more than 5 million Palestinian refugees who have been expelled from their country and dispossessed of their land, homes and livelihood. For more than seven decades, some countries, including members of the Security Council, have been relentlessly attempting to legitimize the odious Israeli occupation, which on 5 June 1967 spread to the Syrian Golan. Those attempts were recently crowned by the launch of provocative deals and initiatives.

The question we must ask ourselves now is: How many decades must the Israeli occupation continue before some finally admit that the Security Council must take serious action to bring it to an end? How many more innocent lives must be lost before some are convinced that the Israeli occupation of the Arab territories is indeed the root cause of instability in our region? There is a long list of questions I could ask in this regard.

My Government wishes to reaffirm its consistent and principled position of support for the Palestinian people in their aspirations to self-determination and the establishment of an independent State throughout the Palestinian territories, with Jerusalem as its capital, while guaranteeing the right to return of refugees in accordance with General Assembly resolution 194 (III) of 1948. Any measures that will or seek to undermine

these rights are null and void. Such measures, including the apartheid law adopted by Israel known as the "nation-State law" and the decision of the United States Government to transfer its Embassy to the occupied city of Jerusalem and to stop funding the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) threaten peace and security in the region and throughout the world. All these measures are null and void and violate the relevant resolutions of both the Council and the General Assembly.

Israel continues to occupy a cherished part of our territory in the Syrian Golan. The Syrian people there continue to suffer from the occupation and its practices of repression and aggression. Israel, as members know, has provided protection and logistical and even direct military to terrorist organizations that have launched repeated attacks against Syrian territory. In so doing, they have violated the 1947 Disengagement of Forces Agreement. They have also exposed the forces of the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) to grave danger due to the terrorist activities that the Israeli occupation authority sponsors in the occupied Syrian Golan.

In this regard, I note that on 8 October, the occupying authority issued an illegal and unjust verdict against Syrian activist Sedqi Suleiman Al-Maqet, who is the Mandela of Syria. Astonishingly, it decided to imprison him for 11 years. The only reason for this 11-year verdict was because he had documented — using recordings and photographs — the collaboration of the Israeli occupation forces with the Al-Nusrah Front in the disengagement zone of the occupied Golan.

Israeli attacks on scientific and civilian infrastructure in Syria are irrefutable proof of a new stage in Israel's exercise of State terrorism. In terms of crime, terrorism and killing civilians, Israel is on its way to compete with Da'esh and Al-Nusrah Front. In addition, Israel evacuated hundreds of the so-called White Helmets — a terrorist organization — to their sponsoring countries to carry out attacks against Syria.

Unfortunately, all of this frenzied escalation has not been acknowledged in reports issued by senior United Nations officials. As we heard this morning, these officials spoke of detecting a kite but they were unable to record Israel's collaboration with terrorist organizations in the disengagement zone in the occupied Syrian Golan. Such are the reports issued by the Secretariat.

In resolution 497 (1981), which was adopted unanimously, the Council stated that the decision taken by Israel on 17 December 1981 to impose Israeli jurisdiction over the occupied Syrian Golan was null and void and without international legal effect. The resolution called on Israel, the occupying Power, to rescind all measures and decisions in the occupied Syrian Golan immediately. I remind the Council that this took place in December 1981. Resolution 497 (1981) called on the Secretary-General to report to the Security Council on the implementation of that resolution within two weeks of its adoption. Meanwhile, the Council decided that, if Israel did not comply with resolution 497 (1981), the Council would hold exceptionally another meeting no later than 5 January 1982 in order to examine in depth the necessary measures to be undertaken in line with the Charter of the United Nations.

Under the principles of international law, I put the following question to the Council. Thirty-seven years after the adoption of resolution 497 (1981), what is the current status of this resolution and why has it not been implemented? Why has the Council not compelled Israel to end the occupation of the Syrian Golan? The Council should have enacted another resolution in January 1982. We have been waiting 37 years for the Council to implement resolution 497 (1981). Some colleagues wonder about the reasons for persisting conflicts in the Middle East. Why are there wars in the Middle East? What are the root causes of violence in the Middle East? They do not know that we are still waiting for the implementation of a Council resolution adopted 37 years ago to liberate the Golan and Jerusalem from the Israeli occupation and to create a Palestinian State. These are the root causes of the war; these are the root causes of the violence.

The Syrian Government categorically rejects the decision of Israel, the occupying Power, to hold elections for so-called local councils in the occupied Syrian Golan. Residents of the Golan have reiterated their rejection of all measures of the repressive Israeli entity seeking to impose its jurisdiction on them, including the organization of so-called local councils in October. Mr. Mladenov did not address this issue or comment on it.

It is unacceptable that the United Nations and Member States continue to treat this odious occupation as if it were simply a routine matter, without taking any serious action leading to tangible results, especially after the statement made by the Prime Minister of the

Israeli entity on 8 October, which proves that Israel has no interest in the Charter of the United Nations and is determined to violate Council's resolutions, including resolution 497 (1981). The Israeli Prime Minister said:

"Israel on the Golan Heights is a solid reality based on ancient rights. Israel on the Golan Heights is a fact that the international community must recognize."

He also said that "as long as it depends on me, the Golan Heights will always remain under Israeli sovereignty."

Unfortunately, this serious statement and all the serious developments in the Golan have not attracted the attention of Mr. Mladenov, who turned a blind eye to such developments in his briefing. He likewise failed to mention any of the various and multiple resolutions of the United Nations that call on the occupying Power to end the occupation of Arab territories. We regret that Mr. Mladenov has transformed his important role of Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process into that of a simple journalist.

We recall that General Assembly resolution 3314 (XXIX) qualifies occupation as the top form of aggression. All those who remain silent on the occupation are therefore partners in that act of aggression against our peoples. To those who seek to turn the meetings of the Council into a media show, simply to prevent definitive legal measures from being taken to bring the Israeli occupation of the Arab territories to an end; to those who vigorously pursue other wars in our region to deplete the potential of our peoples, we say that they are responsible for future developments. We are determined to liberate our territory by all means available to us under the provisions of the Charter of the United Nations and relevant Council resolutions, no matter how long it takes us. Indeed, we have the right to do so and the law is on our side.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Namibia.

Ms. Scott (Namibia): I congratulate you, Madam President, on your country's assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for the month of October, and I thank you for organizing this debate on the important topic of the situation in the Middle East, including the question of Palestine. I would also like to thank Special Coordinator Nickolay Mladenov and Hagai El-Ad, Executive Director of B'Tselem, for their comprehensive and detailed briefings.

My delegation aligns itself with the statement to be delivered by the Permanent Representative of Venezuela on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries.

Namibians are deeply concerned by Mr. Mladenov's recent report, which states that Israeli settlement expansion has continued in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem. We were informed that plans for some 2,800 units had been proposed, some 900 additional units were approved, and tenders for over 1,700 housing units were announced. As reaffirmed in resolution 2334 (2016), those settlements are illegal under international law, represent a serious impediment to the two-State solution, and diminish hope for peace. We also note the ongoing destruction of Palestinian-owned structures over the past five months by Israeli authorities, which has led to the displacement of 145 Palestinians, including 82 children.

Violence represents an impediment to peace. The Great March of Return protests along the Gaza-Israel border fence demand that Palestinian refugees and their descendants be allowed to return to the land from which they were displaced. Namibia is concerned that since March, violence along the fence has been frequent, with dozens killed and injured following the excessive and disproportionate use of force by Israel. On at least three occasions, the situation escalated dramatically. We thank Egypt and the United Nations, which intervened to de-escalate tensions.

The ongoing violence and tension along the border fence has further compounded the situation in Gaza, which remains on the brink of collapse. The overall humanitarian and economic situation continues to deteriorate. More than 53 per cent of the population is unemployed, households receive electricity for three to four hours per day, access to clean water has not improved, and major strain is being placed on the health system.

The situation in Gaza has been exacerbated by the recent decision taken by the United States to terminate its funding for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), which is a stabilizing factor across the region, offering educational, health and social services — a lifeline for Palestinian refugees. The recent proposal made by the mayor of Jerusalem to remove UNRWA-run programmes in the city is a cause for serious concern. If implemented, it will worsen the already harsh conditions of the Palestinian refugees.

The decision taken by the United States Administration to stop funding UNRWA follows other decisions that represent an impediment to peace and an obstacle to the two-State solution. In December 2017, the United States announced its recognition of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel. In May, the United States officially transferred its Embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. That decision was condemned in General Assembly resolution ES-10/19 of December 2017, overwhelmingly adopted by Member States. That resolution notes that "Jerusalem is a final status issue to be resolved through negotiations in line with relevant United Nations resolutions". The decision taken by the United States in September to close the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) office in Washington, D.C., under the pretext that the PLO has not taken steps to advance the start of direct and meaningful negotiations with Israel is also counterproductive. What is needed is dialogue, not more alienation.

As a child of the United Nations that fought tirelessly for its independence, Namibia will always support Palestine in its fight for self-determination. During the debate held a few weeks ago, most Heads of State and Government reaffirmed their strong support for the Palestinian cause. Support for Palestine was also demonstrated in its election as Chair of the Group of 77 and China for the year 2019.

In conclusion, we call on the Israeli Government to end all construction of settlements and the destruction of Palestinian homes and infrastructure. We call for Israel's complete and unconditional withdrawal from the occupied Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem. We urge all parties to return to the negotiation table to ensure that the Palestinian people are able to exercise their inalienable rights in an independent State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital, and as a rightful member of the United Nations and its specialized agencies.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Pakistan.

Ms. Lodhi (Pakistan): We thank the Bolivian presidency for organizing this open debate.

We are meeting at a particularly poignant juncture in the political history of the Middle East. Today, on the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Oslo Accords, the sense of hope and optimism created by the two-State solution has given way to despondency and despair. As the fundamental tenets of the two-State solution are

being systematically dismantled in the plain sight of the international community, it comes as no surprise that there are few people in the region who believe that peace can be achieved in their lifetime. Many more question if peace is at all possible.

An unfortunate sequence of events has exacerbated that sense of despondency. Long-standing resolutions of the Security Council on the status of Jerusalem have been flouted and cast aside. The illegal expansion of Israeli settlements into the occupied territory continues with intensity and impunity. The recent Israeli decision to dismantle the Bedouin community of Khan Al-Ahmar is only one more manifestation of the occupying Power's long-standing policy of forcibly displacing Palestinians from their lands. That measure takes fresh aim at the roots of Palestinian identity and their existence as a people. The killing fields of Gaza continue to be drenched with the blood of innocent Palestinians — over 200 civilians have been killed since peaceful protests began in March, including another seven on 12 October.

The decision by the United States to cease all financial support for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) has not only cast a deep shadow of uncertainty over the long-term sustainability of many of its critical activities, including education, health and social services, it also runs the risk of unravelling the peace dividend gained through the work of that important Agency. From its very inception, UNRWA has served as a vehicle for political stability and social cohesion in its areas of operation.

The humanitarian needs of the Palestinian refugees should not be sacrificed at the altar of political expediency and narrow interests, all the more so when the prospect for a just settlement of the Palestine issue remains more distant than ever. As members of the international community, we must collectively endeavour to preserve the integrity of the Agency's core services to 5.3 million Palestinian refugees.

Pakistan's commitment to our Palestinian brethren remains firm and abiding. As an expression of our solidarity, Pakistan will make an additional contribution to UNRWA this year. The international community must also continue to lend its voice in support of a two-State solution, based on agreed parameters and the 1967 borders, with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as the capital of the Palestinian State.

As instability and violence continue to ravage many parts of the Middle East, the imperative for diplomatic solutions is more urgent than ever. Syrian stakeholders are working towards the establishment of an inclusive constitutional committee, and we commend the diligent efforts over the past five years of the Secretary General's outgoing Special Envoy, Staffan de Mistura, in pursuit of the goal of a negotiated settlement in Syria.

Pakistan will continue to lend its support to a negotiated settlement in Yemen, based on agreed frameworks and through inclusive political engagement. Immediate measures to alleviate the humanitarian suffering of the Yemeni people must remain an equally urgent international priority. The plight of the Palestinians is as old as the United Nations itself. It is also intrinsic and integral to lasting peace in the region.

Over the years, as international efforts to bring an end to the suffering of the Palestinian people have faltered and failed, the burning cauldron of anger and pervasive sense of injustice have inescapably sown the seeds of animosity and violence in the entire region, fuelling instability and intensifying insecurity across the Middle East.

If we want to put out these fires of conflict, we must act decisively again: injustice and oppression across the region and across the world. It is time to bring an end to the tragedy of Palestine. It is time to inspire hopes of peace and mutual coexistence for the entire region.

Despite the heavy odds, our pursuit of this worthy endeavour should be renewed with even greater resolve and determination.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Saudi Arabia.

Mr. Al-Mouallimi (*Saudi Arabia*) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to thank you, Madam, for the work you have done as President of the Council this month and for having convened this important meeting. I would like also to thank Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, for his valuable briefing.

Aisha Mohammed was a 45-year-old Palestinian Arab woman and the mother of eight children. She was murdered in cold blood by a group of Israeli settlers last Friday. Hers was a terrible death. She was stoned to death as she was with her husband, leaving her children motherless. She was killed just for being

a Palestinian woman. That criminal act is but one of the many examples of the ongoing violations carried out by Israeli settlers and soldiers against unarmed Palestinians. It is not enough that they have occupied the land; now they are targeting Palestinian lives, property and holy places.

Among the most heinous Israeli crimes that are being currently committed is the forced eviction of Palestinian residents from Khan Al-Ahmar, in the West Bank, and the unjust blockade that Israel continues to impose on Gaza. All of this requires us to reiterate our call on both the international community and the Security Council to protect the Palestinian people and to bring pressure to bear on Israel to implement international resolutions.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia condemns all Israeli violations and rejects all attempts to undermine the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people. It reaffirms the Arab and Muslim identity of Al-Quds Al-Sharif and the right of the Palestinian State to exercise its sovereignty throughout all Palestinian territories occupied in 1967, including Al-Quds Al-Sharif. My country also condemns Israeli practices in the occupied Arab Syrian Golan. We reject all illegitimate attempts by Israel to annex the Golan. The Kingdom underscores the importance of a lasting and comprehensive peace in the Middle East, a strategic choice that puts an end to the Arab-Israeli conflict through the two-State solution on the basis of the international terms of reference; the 2002 Arab Peace Initiative, which stipulates the creation of a Palestinian State along the 4 June 1967 borders; the return of refugees; and an end to the Israeli occupation of all Arab territories, including the Syrian Golan and Lebanese territory.

The fraternal Syrian people continue to endure the horrors of the violations and crimes against humanity perpetrated by a regime that has lost its legitimacy and sense of humanity. I will limit myself to what I said yesterday in the Council (see S/PV.8373) and stress the importance of urgently establishing a constitutional committee so that it can begin its work of drafting a new national Syrian constitution. This would be a turning point in the Syrian political process and would put an end to hostilities by all parties, bringing about a peaceful transition of power to the representatives of the Syrian people, on the basis of the Geneva communiqué (S/2012/522, annex) and resolution 2254 (2015).

My country denounces the Iranian Government's persistent occupation of the three United Arab Emirates islands — Greater Tunb, Lesser Tunb and Abu Musa, in the Arab Gulf — as well as violations of the sovereignty of the United Arab Emirates, which undermine security and stability in the region and threaten international peace and security. We reaffirm the full sovereignty of the United Arab Emirates over their three islands and support all peaceful measures undertaken by that country to recover their sovereignty over those occupied islands.

Many States have suffered, and continue to suffer, as a result of Iran's aggressive and flagrant interventions in their domestic affairs, which have destabilized the region. These include its support for the coup militias in Yemen and its lack of respect for international resolutions, especially resolutions 2216 (2015) and 2231 (2015). It also threatens continually to block maritime traffic, in particular the Strait of Hormuz. It carries out manoeuvres around Bab Al-Mandab and maintains a presence south of the Red Sea and the Arabian Sea through its vessels and ships.

Perhaps the Council is aware of the fact that a commercially registered vessel, 150 metres long, equipped with machine guns and military boats as well as espionage equipment, is travelling south of the Red Sea. It receives and sends speedboats carrying equipment and material that is clearly not commercial. This Iranian vessel, the *Saviz*, is a military operational centre that jeopardizes the security and safety of international maritime transit. In addition, Iran continuously supports armed terrorist groups that are destabilizing security and stability in the region and throughout the world, such as the terrorist Hizbullah.

The evidence of this revolutionary regime's interference in the internal affairs of States of the region and worldwide, as well as its support for terrorism, is clear and striking. As noted in paragraph 10 of the twenty-second report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team (see S/2018/705), submitted pursuant to resolution 2368 (2017) concerning the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals and entities:

"Al-Qaida leaders in the Islamic Republic of Iran have grown more prominent, working with Ayman al-Zawahiri and projecting his authority more effectively than he could previously. They have influenced events in the Syrian Arab Republic,

countering the authority of Abu Mohammed al-Jawlani and causing formations, breakaways and mergers of various Al-Qaida-aligned groups in Idlib.”

In Yemen, the Houthi coup militias, supported by Iran, continue to turn a deaf ear to the calls made by the international community and the United Nations. Their intractable stance makes it clear that they want to prolong the crisis in Yemen. They did not take seriously the invitation made by the United Nations Envoy during the Yemeni peace negotiations held in Geneva last September. They continue to hinder the delivery of humanitarian assistance convoys and loot them, lay mines and cut off roads. The coup militias have launched more than 200 rockets targeting residential areas of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Those rockets were manufactured in Iran and brought from Iran. The rocket-launcher operators were also trained in Iran, in breach of all relevant provisions of international law. My country, on the other hand, has been generously delivering assistance to the sisterly Republic of Yemen since 2012 — more than \$13 billion so far in all areas, to save lives and maintain the security and prosperity of the people of Yemen.

My country is playing a crucial role in peacefully resolving regional and international crises, in keeping with international conventions and treaties. My country seeks to uphold the principle of the peaceful settlement of disputes and undertakes initiatives aimed at the peaceful resolution of conflicts.

A few weeks ago, we witnessed the historic signing of a peace agreement between Ethiopia and Eritrea in the city of Jeddah in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, sponsored by the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, King Salman Bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud, and in the presence of Secretary-General António Guterres. We also witnessed the beginning of a reconciliation process between Djibouti and Eritrea, with a historic summit held between the Presidents of the two countries in Jeddah. We hope that the summit will lead to reconciliation between the two neighbouring countries. The Kingdom will continue to work towards maintaining security in the Red Sea basin, enabling it to transform into an oasis of peace, cooperation and prosperity among Arab and African States bordering the basin.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Turkey.

Mr. Sinirlioğlu (Turkey): There was a moment in history when we were all hopeful that there would be peace in Israel and Palestine. That is no longer the case. The hope for a just and lasting settlement has never been lower. However, this gloomy picture could have been avoided. It was not inevitable and is the result of deliberate steps.

We are seeing increasing pressure on the daily lives of Palestinians. Gaza is still under a blockade. Israeli security forces use increasingly excessive force against Palestinian civilians. There are restrictions for the Muslims who want to visit Haram al-Sharif. Recently, we have seen the displacement of Bedouins from Khan Al-Ahmar and the introduction of the Jewish nation-State law, which disregard the basic rights of the Palestinian people. The aim of such measures is to pressure Palestinians into accepting the status quo by enforcing hardship and humiliation.

We are also witnessing systematic efforts to undermine the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people. That is an attempt to change the terms of reference of the Middle East conflict and destroy the hope for a two-State solution. We are entitled to our own views but not to our own facts. According to international law, the Palestinians have the right to their own State based on the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital. That cannot be changed. According to United Nations resolutions, Palestinians have the right to return to their homeland. That cannot be withheld. The refugee status of the people of Palestine is a legitimate right and cannot be used as a bargaining chip. The Israeli settlements in the occupied territories are illegal and cannot be ignored. Those are facts and are based on international law.

The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) is the most recent target of the efforts to collectively punish the Palestinians. The services provided by UNRWA are vital to meet the basic needs of the Palestinian refugees and to show that they are not forgotten. The Agency also plays a critical role in the stability of the region. Last month, schools for hundreds of thousands of Palestinian children across Palestine, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria were reopened. Who is going to benefit if the Palestinians are subjected to more difficulty?

As Chair of the UNRWA Advisory Commission and the Working Group on the Financing of UNRWA, Turkey is proud to support the Agency's work and

has increased its annual contribution. We have also requested traditional donors to increase their contributions, and we have been working to expand the donor base of UNRWA. During the high-level week, we co-hosted a landmark meeting, during which we mobilized \$122 million. We expect all countries to step up and help UNRWA.

It is high time to stand for justice and the protection of the established parameters for a lasting peace in Palestine. The international community must fulfil its moral responsibility. Turkey is ready to do its part.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Japan.

Mr. Bessho (Japan): I thank you, Madam President, for organizing this open debate, and I thank the briefers for their briefings.

Japan remains committed to supporting a two-State solution. We continue to believe that the most realistic solution to the conflict is two sovereign States living side by side within secure and recognized borders. Lasting peace and security can be achieved only through negotiations between the parties. However, at present, there is little trust between the parties and we do not see momentum towards renewed direct negotiations. Each of us has a role to play in overcoming that impasse.

For our part, Japan is committed to continuing its unique confidence-building measures to create an atmosphere conducive to meaningful negotiations. The role of the United States remains important. The international community must engage with the parties to bring about meaningful peace negotiations towards a solution in line with the relevant Security Council resolutions and the internationally agreed parameters. Progress will require leadership by both parties. At the same time, we must work to maintain people's faith in the possibility of a political settlement. I would like to highlight three points.

First, the serious economic and humanitarian situation in Gaza needs to be urgently addressed. Japan commends the efforts of Special Coordinator Mladenov and his team in defusing violence and providing economic and humanitarian interventions. We are committed to supporting the implementation of the package agreed at the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee for the Coordination of International Assistance to Palestinians. We ask for the support of Israel and the Palestinian Authority to ensure that the people in

Gaza will benefit from the package. The return of the Palestinian Authority to Gaza is crucial.

Secondly, the continued settlement activities and the demolition of Palestinian-owned structures deprive the Palestinian people of hope and undermine the viability of a two-State solution. Japan once again strongly urges Israel to cease those activities.

Thirdly, we believe that investment in the next generation is important. As Prime Minister Abe mentioned in the general debate last month, we will start a new programme to invite elementary and junior high school teachers from Gaza to Japan each year. With regard to investment in the next generation, the role of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) remains important. We are pleased with the tangible outcome of the ministerial meeting held on 27 September, which Foreign Minister Kono co-chaired. During the meeting, Japan announced new assistance to UNRWA of \$4.5 million to help with the electricity shortfalls in Gaza, in addition to the assistance already committed to and dispersed this year. Japan is also continuing its long-standing Israel-Palestine youth invitation programme, which marks its twentieth anniversary this year. The international community must stand united to maintain the viability of a long-term political settlement. Japan is ready to enhance its political engagement with both parties.

In Syria, the agreement between Russia and Turkey has brought about a provisional ceasefire in Idlib, which must be made permanent given the threat facing its more than 3 million civilians. Advancement of the political process is fundamental. Japan therefore strongly supports the efforts made by Special Envoy of the Secretary-General De Mistura over the years, especially for the establishment of the constitutional committee. Japan will continue to deliver humanitarian assistance to all Syrians facing difficulties, no matter who controls the area.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Jordan.

Ms. Bahous (Jordan) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, allow me to thank you, Madam President, and your country for the efforts undertaken during your presidency of the Security Council in safeguarding its pivotal role in maintaining international peace and security.

I also thank Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, for his comprehensive briefing and for his efforts to achieve progress in the region's peace process.

The Palestinian people continue to suffer as a result of the ongoing Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territories and the lack of a political vision for a just, lasting and comprehensive solution. Their human rights continue to be systematically violated and they are deprived of their fundamental rights, in conjunction with dire economic and social conditions, particularly in the Gaza Strip. That has led to a substantial increase in poverty and the denial of the most basic human rights. It highlights the magnitude of the historical injustice being suffered by those people and requires positive international action to end the tragedy.

Jordan underscores the centrality of the Palestinian question and the need to find a just and comprehensive solution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and suffering, which would allow the Palestinian people to enjoy their right to live in freedom and dignity within their own State. Our position on the Palestinian question is resolute and steadfast. Our message to the world is that the injustices suffered by the Palestinians must come to an end so that the brotherly Palestinian people can establish an independent and sovereign State. The two-State solution, in accordance with international law, the relevant Security Council resolutions and the Arab Peace Initiative, is the only way to end the conflict by establishing an independent, sovereign and viable Palestinian State within the borders of 4 June 1967, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

The Hashemite custodianship of Jerusalem's Muslim and Christian holy sites is a solemn responsibility that Jordan is proud to shoulder. My country will spare no effort in withstanding any attempts to change the historical Arab, Islamic and Christian identity of the holy city. The Kingdom condemns in the strongest terms the ongoing Israeli violations and provocations against the Al-Aqsa Mosque in Haram al-Sharif. We particularly condemn the provocative incursions by Israeli extremists and settlers into the courtyards of Haram al-Sharif, which are systematically carried out under the protection of the Israeli police. Such actions are condemned and rejected. They violate the sanctity of that sacred place and upsets worshippers and Muslims all over the world. They also violate Israel's obligations as an occupying Power under international law and international humanitarian law, as well as all

international conventions and norms that emphasize the need to respect places of worship for all religions.

My country condemns the forced displacement and deportation of the inhabitants of Khan Al-Ahmar as part of an expansionist settlement policy that Israel uses to impose a fait accompli and to undermine the two-State solution, threatening further instability in the region.

The serious financial deficit of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) is hampering its ability to provide basic services to millions of refugees and poses a threat to the stability of host communities. That leaves us with two options — either to nurture a positive generation of young people or to leave them prey to the forces of extremism and despair.

Despite the efforts of the international community to reduce the deficit, which stood at \$446 million at the beginning of this year and now stands at \$64 million, we continue to face that problem at the beginning of each year. We must therefore come up with innovative ideas and constructive initiatives to ensure predictable and sustainable funding for UNRWA so that it can carry out its United Nations mandate, respect the rights of refugees to live in dignity, guarantee the rights of more than 500,000 refugee children to go to school and continue to provide them and their families with vital services.

The Syrian crisis is now entering its eighth year. A political solution remains the only feasible way to guarantee peace and stability in Syria and to maintain its territorial integrity. A political solution must be acceptable to the brotherly Syrian people and meet their aspirations, in accordance with resolution 2254 (2015) and the Geneva communiqué (S/2012/522, annex). We commend the key role of the United Nations in making progress towards a political solution to the crisis in Syria. We refer, in particular, to the statement issued by the small group of the global coalition on Syria, which underscores the importance of forming a constitutional committee without delay and enabling it to start its work on the political process, with the participation of all Syrian stakeholders and under the auspices of the United Nations.

I would also like to congratulate the State of brotherly Iraq on the success of its parliamentary elections and the recent selection of the three presidencies, benefiting Iraq and the region as a whole. I emphasize our

commitment to continuing to cooperate with the new Iraqi Government. My country stood by Iraq as it faced the scourge of terrorism and will continue to do so as the country seeks to rebuild itself, based on our firm belief that the success of Iraq is a success for all and that a united, democratic, safe and secure Iraq is in the interests of its people, the entire region and the world.

The absence of a just solution to the Palestinian question and the continuation of the crisis in Syria, as well as the challenges facing some countries in the region as they seek to consolidate security, stability and reconstruction, are issues that compel us to work harder and to stand unified in order to overcome those difficulties and challenges. Those exceptional circumstances call for a unified strategic vision and the strengthening of our capacity to preserve international peace and security by institutionalizing joint action and translating it into reality.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the observer of the European Union.

Ms. Adamson: The situation in the occupied Palestinian territory continues to deteriorate and the prospect of a two-State solution for Israel and Palestine continues to be dismantled piece by piece, as mentioned by High Representative Federica Mogherini at the third Regional Forum of the Union for the Mediterranean in Barcelona on 8 October. The European Union (EU) is deeply concerned by the situation in Gaza. Gaza is home to 2 million people who struggle to access basic services, sufficient water and electricity supplies.

In the past few weeks, as living conditions continue to worsen, the ongoing protests and violence at the Gaza border fence, fuelled by Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad, have intensified and expanded in nature. They have further worsened the already volatile situation in and around the Gaza Strip. The launching of incendiary kites and balloons has now continued for more than half a year. It has caused severe damage in Israeli communities near Gaza and must stop. During the same period, more than 200 Palestinians have been killed and over 21,000 have been injured, most injuries coming from live ammunition and gas inhalation. That raises serious questions about the proportionate use of force, which must be addressed through independent and transparent investigations.

We expect the de facto authorities in Gaza to do their utmost to prevent further escalation. The EU urges all actors concerned to act with the utmost restraint

to avoid further loss of life, prevent any escalation, discourage recourse to violence and not exploit the demonstrations for other means. While recalling Israel's right to self-defence, we expect the Israeli authorities to respect the principle of necessity and proportionality in its use of force. Serious questions have arisen about the proportionate use of force, which must be addressed through independent and transparent investigations. The European Union takes note of the fact-finding assessment mechanism established by the Israel Defense Forces to review its own actions and specific incidents that have taken place on the Israeli-Gaza border since 30 March. The facts must also be established regarding reports about violent attacks against Israel under the guise of the protests.

The European Union will continue its support for the work undertaken by Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process Nickolay Mladenov. We commend his efforts to alleviate the humanitarian crisis in Gaza, including the fuel-delivery deal reached last week thanks to his engagement. We call on the parties to cooperate with the Special Coordinator and the wider international community to support him in the operationalization of the proposed humanitarian and economic interventions for Gaza, in continued close coordination with the Palestinian Authority, in order to secure and coordinate, among other things, the provision of lifesaving health care, increase access to clean water and energy supplies, improve the overall economic conditions and promote conditions that enable intra-Palestinian unity. The immediate priority must be to reduce tensions and avoid another conflict in Gaza. The return of the Palestinian Authority to the Gaza Strip is indispensable if we wish to improve the conditions and humanitarian situation in a sustainable manner.

Additional financial efforts by the international community are needed. But in order to ensure lasting results, a fundamental change in the situation in Gaza is critical. That should include an end to the closure and the full opening of crossing points, while addressing Israel's legitimate security concerns. In that light, we welcome the continued opening of the Rafah crossing. In the meantime, the EU will continue to support United Nations and Egyptian efforts towards the reunification of Gaza and the West Bank under one single and legitimate Palestinian Authority. The EU will continue to work towards that end with our partners, the Israelis and the Palestinians, regional actors and our partners within the Middle East Quartet. We hope that the

United States peace plan for the Middle East will provide another contribution in that regard.

Indispensable humanitarian assistance must overcome political divisions. Stopping the important activities of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) could well cause instability and create a vacuum that would only serve the extremists. That is why the EU and its member States have collectively been the largest contributors to UNRWA's budget. We are and will continue to be strong, reliable and predictable supporters of the Agency. Just a few weeks ago the EU increased its financial support to UNRWA by €40 million, raising the total contribution to the Agency to €146 million since the beginning of this year.

In the ministerial meeting that the EU co-chaired along with two EU member States, Sweden and Germany, and other partners on 27 September, participants underlined the importance of fully supporting the ability of UNRWA to implement its mandate effectively, namely, to assist and protect Palestine refugees, while continuing to ensure transparency and accountability in its programmes. Next year will be an even tougher year for UNRWA. In that context we need to stress once again the crucial importance for UNRWA and donors to intensify efforts to put the Agency on a stable financial footing while maintaining a focus on its mandate. We will continue to do our utmost to ensure that UNRWA and its dedicated staff continue to operate until a just, fair, agreed and realistic solution to the plight of Palestine refugees is finally reached.

Twenty-five years after the signing of the Oslo Accords, a just and lasting peace among Israelis and Palestinians is still sorely missing. While the Oslo Accords have not accomplished their overall goal, one of their major achievements is that Palestinian institutions are in place. It is in the interests of both the Palestinians and the Israelis that their stability be preserved.

The EU will continue to urge both parties to refrain from unilateral actions that undermine the relaunching of the negotiations or imperil the viability of the two-State solution. There is no justification for incitement and violence. We follow with great concern the situation on the ground, in particular the pending demolition of the Bedouin village of Khan Al-Ahmar, including its school, in a location of strategic interest for preserving the contiguity of a future Palestinian State, as well as the decision taken last Sunday by the Israeli authorities

to move forward plans for settlement expansion in Hebron. The EU has repeatedly urged Israel not to execute its decision to demolish the Khan Al-Ahmar community or displace its citizens and today reiterates its strong opposition to Israel's settlement policy and actions taken in that context, including demolitions and confiscation — including some EU-funded projects — evictions and forced transfers. Settlements are illegal under international law, constitute an obstacle to peace, and threaten to make a two-State solution impossible.

We must work together to reverse the current negative developments on the ground, which are leading us away from a negotiated two-State solution with Jerusalem as the future capital of both States. A two-State solution based on the 1967 borders that meets Israeli and Palestinian security needs and Palestinian aspirations for statehood and sovereignty, ends the occupation, and resolves all final-status issues remains the only viable and realistic way to end the conflict and achieve just and lasting peace. The EU will continue to work towards that end with both parties and its regional and international partners, starting with the Middle East Quartet.

The conflict in Syria has continued for more than seven years and has caused immense suffering. Millions of people have been forced to find refuge in other countries or have faced starvation, sieges and armed offensives within their country, along with blatant and ongoing violations of human rights and international humanitarian law, in particular by the Syrian regime. The Syrian regime bears the overwhelming responsibility for the catastrophic humanitarian situation and the suffering of the Syrian people.

The EU acknowledges the signing of the memorandum to establish a ceasefire in Idlib and calls on the Astana guarantors to ensure that that ceasefire is upheld and to safeguard the last remaining de-escalation zone in Syria. The EU expects that they will follow through on their commitment and also guarantee the protection of civilian lives and infrastructure, as well as safe, unhindered and sustained humanitarian access across Syria.

The EU expresses its full support for the mandate and efforts of the United Nations Special Envoy for Syria aimed at establishing a constitutional committee that will serve as the first step towards an inclusive, credible and sustainable political solution in Syria, in accordance with resolution 2254 (2015) and the Geneva

communiqué (S/2012/522, annex). The EU commits itself to remain at the forefront of international efforts for accountability and justice in Syria. All those responsible for breaches of international law and human rights law, some of which may constitute war crimes and crimes against humanity, must be held accountable. We reiterate our condemnation of the repeated use of chemical weapons in Syria by the Syrian regime and Da'esh, as confirmed by the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW)-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism. We are deeply concerned by continuing reports by the OPCW Fact-finding Mission in the Syrian Arab Republic pointing to the use of chemical weapons in various locations in Syria in recent months.

The EU welcomes the recent decision by the Conference of States Parties to the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production, Stockpiling and Use of Chemical Weapons and on Their Destruction to enhance the OPCW's capacity to identify the perpetrators of the use of chemical weapons in Syria. The EU has imposed restrictive measures on Syrian high-level officials and scientists and has adopted a new global sanctions regime for the use of chemical weapons.

In the meantime, we reiterate our calls upon all the parties to the conflict and those actors with influence over them, especially the Syrian regime and its allies, to ensure unhindered sustained humanitarian access and medical evacuations for all Syrians in need. The situation in Rukban camp is particularly appalling. The EU calls on all stakeholders to facilitate immediate humanitarian access.

The EU supports the rights of Syrians to return to their homes voluntarily and in safety and dignity, in line with international humanitarian law, when conditions allow. The EU calls for safe and equal access to civil documentation on housing and property rights so as to ensure that the rights of Syrians are preserved and that those displaced are provided with the basic conditions to be able to return to their homes in a dignified, safe and voluntary way when conditions allow.

However, the EU agrees with the assessment of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) that conditions for non-coercive and safe repatriation are not yet in place. It is critical that work undertaken to build those conditions be well coordinated with all relevant actors, in particular

UNHCR. The EU will organize a third Brussels conference on supporting the future of Syria and the region in the last week of March 2019, so as to support the United Nations-led political process for a solution to the conflict, provide a platform for the voices of Syrian civil society, and seek pledges by EU member States and international donors.

Finally, the EU reiterates that it will be ready to assist in the reconstruction of Syria only when a comprehensive, genuine and inclusive political transition, negotiated by the Syrian parties to the conflict, on the basis of resolution 2254 (2015) and the 2012 Geneva communiqué, is firmly under way.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Brazil.

Mr. Vieira (Brazil): Brazil reiterates its long-standing support for the implementation of the two-State solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, with Palestine and Israel living side by side in peace and security within internationally recognized and mutually agreed borders based on the 1967 lines, in accordance with international law, the Charter of the United Nations, the relevant United Nations resolutions and the established guidelines of the peace process. At the heart of that formula is the need to work towards the end of the occupation and the establishment of a Palestinian State that is fully sovereign, economically viable and territorially contiguous, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

In that regard, the expansion of Israeli settlements in Palestine, which are illegal under international law, as well as the incitement and inflammatory rhetoric on both sides, continues to hinder the achievement of a lasting peace in the region. The Brazilian Government maintains its understanding that the final status of the city of Jerusalem should be defined in negotiations between Israel and Palestine on the basis of the relevant Security Council resolutions, especially resolutions 478 (1980) and 2334 (2016).

Brazil remains deeply concerned with the dire humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip. The escalation of violence over the past few months underscores the urgent need for a political solution to the conflict, which includes inter-Palestinian reconciliation.

The critical financial situation of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) and the effect

that the recurrent underfunding of the Agency has on its ability to address the needs of Palestinian refugees is yet another worrying development in the region. As a member of the Advisory Commission of UNRWA, we underline the vital role the Agency plays in ensuring health, education and other basic services for almost 5.3 million refugees. We call on all parties to abstain from any actions that may jeopardize UNRWA's capacity to fulfil its purpose.

Brazil remains deeply worried about the situation in Syria and welcomes the agreement reached to create a demilitarized zone between opposition and Government forces in the Idlib governorate. We urge all relevant parties to fully comply with this agreement. We also wish to reiterate our full support for the efforts of Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura and the intra-Syrian political negotiations in Geneva. We look forward to the establishment of a constitutional committee in line with the agreements reached in Sochi and reaffirm our support for an inclusive political solution to the Syrian crisis based on the parameters set forth in the relevant Security Council resolutions, namely, resolution 2254 (2015), and taking full advantage of the conditions created by the Astana process. We renew our hope that a political process, mediated by the United Nations and led by the Syrian people, will bring about the end of the war and a peaceful solution to the conflict.

With regard to Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura's decision to step down at the end of November, Brazil wishes to thank him for his tireless efforts aimed at promoting conditions for an inclusive and credible political solution to this long-lasting conflict.

The civil war in Yemen, which has entered its fourth year, is currently the largest humanitarian crisis in the world. The Brazilian Government is alarmed by repeated allegations of violations of international humanitarian law in Yemen. Brazil remains gravely concerned about the situation in the port city of Hodeidah and calls on all parties to ensure that the port remains fully operational in order to avoid further humanitarian consequences for the people of Yemen. The only viable path for the future of the country is through a negotiated settlement. Brazil expresses its full support for the plan put forward by Special Envoy Martin Griffiths to relaunch political negotiations and implement confidence-building measures. We urge all parties to fully engage in efforts towards a negotiated solution for the conflict.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the Permanent Observer of the Observer State of the Holy See to the United Nations.

Monsignor Grysa (Holy See): The Holy See thanks the Plurinational Republic of Bolivia and its presidency of the Security Council for convening today's open debate on a topic that brings us back to the early days of the United Nations, specifically when, by resolution 181 (II) of 1947, the mandated territory of Palestine was divided into two States, one Jewish, the other Arab. For some 70 years, the Palestinian question has been the topic of a great many reports, debates and resolutions in the Security Council Chamber and in other United Nations organs.

The Holy See has supported the two-State solution from the very beginning, and my delegation reaffirms once again the Holy See's unwavering view that the two-State Solution as the only viable way of fulfilling the aspirations for peaceful coexistence among Israelis and Palestinians alike and the only feasible peace plan that would allow both nations to live side by side within secure and internationally recognized borders.

The facts on the ground, as presented to the Security Council on a monthly basis by the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, are a source of persistent grave concern. Leaders on both sides bear the heaviest responsibility in guiding their people in the direction of a mutually agreed resolution to the conflict, rather than leading them into deeper conflict. The Holy See calls on both Israel and Palestine to demonstrate wisdom, responsibility and the political will needed to reach a historic peace agreement that would meet the legitimate aspirations of both peoples. Undertaking dialogue with perseverance and good will must replace inflammatory rhetoric, violence and conflict. Innocent civilians must never be the target of terror or inordinate military actions.

The Israeli-Palestinian discord and the intra-Palestinian divisions have also been exacerbated by external forces and the geopolitical interests of other countries. The Holy See therefore wishes to exhort neighbours in the region and other concerned States from outside the region to facilitate and sustain the peace process, instead of obstructing or scuttling it for their own interests.

The Holy See wishes to reaffirm the historic status quo of Jerusalem, in accordance with the relevant United Nations resolutions, and rejects any unilateral

measure aimed at changing it. At the same time, it calls upon the United Nations to carefully consider the status of Jerusalem as recommended by General Assembly resolution 181 (II) of 1947. My delegation believes that the Holy City should be a place of convergence and peace and that the followers of the three monotheistic religions of Judaism, Christianity and Islam should be guaranteed free and unhindered access to its holy places. Accordingly, the initial proposal of an international status guaranteed by the United Nations remains of great importance in fulfilling the City's singular calling. Indeed, the Holy City of Jerusalem undoubtedly holds a very special place not only in the hearts of the inhabitants of the city, but also for the followers throughout the world of the three monotheistic religions. May it become truly what its name means: City of Peace.

My delegation notes with great concern the dire humanitarian situation that the Palestine refugees and the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) are facing. The Agency provides a range of essential support for some 5.6 million registered Palestine refugees, supplying the most basic human needs from housing to education, health care and social services. In a situation that shows no sign of being resolved quickly, a fully functional UNRWA remains the best means to prevent the situation in the region from worsening in a way that would bring both greater cost and likely greater expenditures to the international community.

Like UNRWA, various charitable action groups and organizations of the Catholic Church provide education, health care and social services to Palestine refugees and to Palestinians in general. The Holy See hopes and prays that, sooner rather than later, a fair and durable solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict may be reached through the resumption of final-status negotiations aimed at reaching a two-State solution, with Israel and a Palestinian State living side by side in peace and security within internationally recognized borders.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Indonesia.

Ms. Krisnamurthi (Indonesia): As it appears that today's open debate on Palestine may be the last in the Security Council for this year, I wish to take this opportunity to express the appreciation of the Government of Indonesia to the delegation of Bolivia

for its sincere and consistent support for the Palestinian cause during its tenure.

Regrettably, rather than advancing our understanding or making contributions to achieving peace and resolution, this quarterly debate on the Middle East has become a showcase for the occupying Power's illegal activities and violence towards the territory it occupies and the people there, including women and children. We seem to be mere spectators of a series of increasingly disturbing tragedies, without the capacity or perhaps even the conscience to stop them. It seems that we are becoming indifferent and emotionless, ready to treat the situation as commonplace. It seems that at every meeting now we are learning of new and more ambitious illegal settlements, the demolition of houses and property, restrictions and blockades. We hear of the excessive use of force, of arbitrary detentions and other illegalities, which also look like what we have seen in previous reports. The report before us (S/2018/614) on the implementation of resolution 2334 (2016) is yet another. But the truth is that those reports are about people, families and communities. They are about human lives and human beings like us, whose only desire is for a normal, peaceful life, but who are facing those violent acts and denials of their rights every day.

Indonesia must repeat what it has been saying for a long time, which is that the issue of the occupation of Palestine has lasted too long. The responsibility for it belongs to the Council, and we object to any attempts to divert attention from it at this critical time. While we are certainly aware that the Charter of the United Nations does not provide the Council with an enforcement mechanism for ensuring that its decisions are honoured, we are hopeful that the Council realizes that the Palestinians also deserve to live in peace, and that this organ can do far more than it has done so far in that regard.

We reaffirm the principles of the Charter, which set clear parameters for the Council in areas such as the equal rights of States, self-determination, respect for human rights, the non-use of force and territorial integrity. As a strong proponent of multilateralism, Indonesia reiterates that the Council was and is meant to be the main organ not simply for maintaining the principle of world peace, but for preventing the unilateral use of violence by any State against civilians or other States. In effect, it is meant to be a force for peace in the world by being a safeguard against injustice and impunity anywhere in the world.

Indonesia wants to place on the record the continuing carnage by Israeli forces since the Great March of Return protests began in May. At least 198 Palestinians, including 31 children, three people with disabilities, three paramedics and two journalists, have been killed. In addition, more than 20,000 have been injured, some of them with life-changing and paralyzing injuries. On 28 September, seven Palestinians, including two children, were killed in one day during the demonstrations, and hundreds were injured. According to the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, those numbers represent the highest fatality toll in a single day since 14 May, when 42 Palestinians were killed. We condemn that senseless violence and support the call for the protection of the Palestinian people, including through the dispatch of an international protection force.

On the question of Syria, we welcome the creation of a demilitarized buffer zone in the governorate of Idlib. It is proof that diplomacy has produced positive progress in the effort to avoid civilian casualties. The protection of civilians must be an absolute priority for all stakeholders, and Indonesia believes that a political settlement through dialogue and negotiation is the best solution.

Finally, with regard to Yemen, Indonesia is concerned about the serious deterioration in the humanitarian situation, and we call on the international community to take swift and concerted action to prevent widespread famine. Steps must be taken to resume a dialogue between the parties to address urgent concerns and make progress towards a political settlement of the conflict.

Let me end by calling on both parties in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict to refrain from provocative actions, incitement and inflammatory rhetoric, as mandated by resolution 2334 (2016). In our view, that call should also be addressed to other Member States. We need to remind ourselves that our provocative statements or actions will contribute nothing but an escalation of the situation on the ground. We call on Member States to create the conditions necessary for promoting peace and rebuilding trust and confidence. We also hope that the Council will refrain from any double-standard practices that could erode its credibility and authority. We call on it to implement its binding resolutions, including resolution 2334 (2016), which is crucial to the advancement of peace.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to Mr. Cheikh Niang, Chair of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People.

Mr. Niang (*spoke in French*): At the outset, I would like to commend Bolivia for the efficacy with which it is guiding the work of the Security Council this month, and for its unwavering support to the Palestinian cause and a two-State solution, as demonstrated throughout its term on the Council and by its recognition of the State of Palestine in 2010.

Today's open debate gives us an opportunity, on behalf of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, to appeal once more to this organ charged with the maintenance of international peace and security to act and redress the ever-deteriorating situation in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem. That is all the more urgent because, 70 years after the Arab-Israeli war and 51 years into the Israeli occupation, we still do not have a clear political horizon for achieving a just, lasting and peaceful solution to the conflict.

The expansion of Israeli settlements, in violation of the relevant Security Council resolutions, including resolution 2334 (2016), undermines not only the contiguity of Palestinian territory but also the Palestinian people's basic rights. In addition, the occupying Power has also persisted in its attempts to forcibly displace Palestinian civilians and seize their land. In that regard, we deplore the plans to demolish the Bedouin village of Khan Al-Ahmar, a violation of international humanitarian law that has rightly been condemned by major sections of the international community. The Committee also deplores unilateral measures likely to undermine the international consensus on final status issues, including that of Jerusalem.

In a recent report, the World Bank declared the socioeconomic situation on the Gaza Strip to be in "free fall", and that does not take into account the ongoing deterioration of the situation on the humanitarian front, all of which are factors that risk provoking a new military escalation. The Committee therefore calls on all sides to exercise restraint and de-escalate tensions. In that context, while supporting the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East and its staff, who are often exposed to serious threats, the Committee renews its urgent call to all Member States to continue and step up their

support to the Agency in order to ensure that it has the sufficient, predictable and lasting resources it needs to guarantee the continuity of the vital services it provides to Palestine refugees. The Committee also urges Israel to lift its 11-year blockade of Gaza, and calls for a reconciliation between Palestine's politicians with a view to reunifying their people.

While the international community remains paralysed, the current demonstrations have resulted in many civilian casualties among Palestinians, including children, particularly in Jerusalem and at the Gaza fence. Because we continue to believe firmly that violence can never resolve this conflict, the Committee supports efforts to create an expanded multilateral framework aimed at reviving the peace process on a basis of the long-standing platforms in this area, with a view to arriving at a two-State solution. The Committee believes that as an international community, we must reconsider the way in which we collectively assume our responsibilities with regard to the Charter of the United Nations. In that regard, the daily violations of the 86 Security Council and 705 General Assembly resolutions represent a threat to the credibility of the United Nations and the rule of law.

The high-level week of the General Assembly at its seventy-third session presented a majority of the world's leaders with an opportunity to reaffirm their commitment to multilateralism and to stress the central role of the United Nations in resolving the Palestinian question. We are pleased to note that, today, 139 Member States have officially recognized the State of Palestine. The Committee encourages those who have not yet done so, in particular members of the European Union, to follow that trend in order to demonstrate, as they did with the State of Israel, their commitment to international legitimacy and the two-State solution.

The Committee welcomes the adoption of resolution 73/5 by a significant majority of the General Assembly. The resolution provides temporary additional prerogatives to the State of Palestine, which will assume the annual chairmanship of the Group of 77 and China beginning in January 2019. The chairmanship of the Group, which includes of 134 member States, is a further noteworthy testimony to the growing confidence that the international community places in Palestine.

If we want to safeguard our collective action, then we must put our money where our mouth is and put an

end to the historic injustice suffered by the Palestinian people and promote the two-State solution, based on the pre-June 1967 borders, in accordance with relevant United Nations resolutions and international law.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of South Africa.

Mr. Molefe (South Africa): South Africa would like to thank Bolivia for organizing this important quarterly open debate on the situation in the Middle East with a particular focus on the Palestinian/Israeli situation. We would also like to extend our appreciation to the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process for his informative briefing.

South Africa is deeply concerned about the deteriorating situation in Palestine, which has been allowed to grow worse as a result of the complete lack of progress in the peace process. At the heart of finding a genuine resolution to the conflict is the need for the parties to come together to decide the most contentious issues between them. That can only be achieved after a process of trust has been built and a genuine commitment to peace has been shown. A resolution on final status issues, including the status of Jerusalem, the fate of Palestinian refugees and Israeli settlements, as well borders and security issues, cannot be imposed by external parties. Peace negotiations are delicate and challenging processes that require that trust and goodwill be developed between the parties in order to be successful. We stress that the fate of the parties to such processes cannot be decided by external actors.

Unfortunately, the expansion of Israeli settlements and the continued military belligerence on the part of the Israeli Defence Force does nothing to create the trust and goodwill needed to move the process forward. It only furthers the negative externalities, such as the perpetuation of the Palestinian refugee crisis.

In that regard, we wish to once again recognize the importance of the work of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), which has provided crucial socioeconomic assistance to Palestinian refugees for decades. Cuts in the budget of UNRWA threaten the lives of many vulnerable people and undermine any confidence in achieving a resolution to the conflict. Punishing civilians by cutting off humanitarian funding cannot in any way be conceived as moving the peace process forward. By reducing funding, it is almost as if we were insinuating that people chose to live in conditions

such as those. South Africa welcomes recent pledges made to support UNRWA, and it affirms that such humanitarian support creates the conditions that could one day assist the full-fledged self-determination and ultimate prosperity of the Palestinian people.

The vast majority of Palestine's population have lived their entire lifetime under Israeli occupation. For over half a decade, Palestinians have been denied their dignity and fundamental rights to free movement, education, health care and even the right to life. The longer we proceed without progress in the Middle East peace process, the more unmanageable the negative impacts will be, not only for the people of Palestine, but also for the region and the world.

The people of Palestine continue to look to the international community, in particular the United Nations, to help them realize their right to self-determination. After all, we, the United Nations, agreed in 1947 to establish two independent States, the independent State of Israel and the free and independent State of Palestine, living side by side. The State of Israel was established, but 71 years later the Palestinian State is just a dream. We must do all we can to consolidate our solidarity and work towards a just and sustainable solution for the Palestinian people.

South Africa wishes to emphasize the importance of the greater inclusion of women in the peace process, because there is a growing recognition that the activism of women and their leadership accelerate initial peace efforts and that marginalizing women only weakens the prospects for peace. We also acknowledge the role of women's non-violent activism for peace in both societies and believe that those initiatives should be drawn on to create the much needed good will and commitment to boosting the prospects for peace.

It is clear that peace and security throughout the Middle East will not be attained without peace between Israel and Palestine, as it remains a central source of discord and conflict among the diverse peoples of the region. We reaffirm that the responsibility for attaining peace is primarily in the hands of the people of Palestine and Israel. We, as part of the international community, should support and encourage the parties in that endeavour. The international legal framework for those negotiations has been set. They include the relevant General Assembly and Security Council resolutions, the Madrid principles, the Arab Peace Initiative and the Quartet road map, to name but a few.

However, we should also acknowledge that the situation cannot continue as usual and that a much needed impetus is required to get the peace process back on track.

In conclusion, my delegation believes that dialogue and negotiation remain the only way to find a lasting solution in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Furthermore, I would like to reiterate my delegation's commitment to continuing to work on this matter within the United Nations and other multilateral forums to seek ways of countering in a fair and equitable manner the threat posed to international peace and security by this conflict.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Bangladesh.

Mr. Bin Momen (Bangladesh): I am honoured to address the Security Council on behalf of the member States of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), for which the Palestinian question has been and remains an issue of foremost concern. It demands priority collective action, including by the Security Council, in accordance with international law, the Charter and the relevant resolutions of the United Nations, and the fundamental principles of justice and humankind.

This open debate is being held at a critical juncture for the Palestinian cause, which is experiencing unprecedented and existential challenges, particularly owing to the absence of any serious political and legal actions by this body to enforce its standing resolutions aimed at ending Israel's illegal, decades-long foreign occupation and its violations of the human rights of the Palestinian people. The absence of serious accountability and action has deepened the political impasse, exacerbated the humanitarian suffering of the Palestinian people, and created an unsustainable and highly volatile situation.

The OIC cautions that the current political stalemate is neither acceptable nor viable. We believe that the Security Council should not remain an observer while this already fragile situation continues to deteriorate and further destabilize as Israel persists with its unlawful and destructive occupation policies, which are undermining the contiguity and viability of the State of Palestine and jeopardizing the prospects for realizing the two-State solution based on the pre-1967 borders, let alone the fact that Israel's policies and measures constitute flagrant violations of United Nations resolutions and Palestinians' legitimate rights and in many cases amount to war crimes.

The Palestinian question remains a litmus test for our collective resolve to help restore confidence in international law, the international system and the potential to realize peace and justice. The multilateral engagement of the international community, as per the relevant resolutions, including resolution 2334 (2016), is needed now more than ever to salvage the two-State solution and revive the deadlocked peace process, with a view to achieving a comprehensive solution based on the internationally agreed parameters, including United Nations resolutions, the Madrid principles and the Arab Peace Initiative.

The OIC has repeatedly drawn the international community's attention to Israel's colonial policies in occupied East Jerusalem, which continue to illegally alter the character, status and demographic composition of the city and isolate it from its natural Palestinian environs. By the same token, the frequent assaults at Al-Aqsa Mosque and upon Muslim worshippers by Israeli police and settlers continue to aggravate tensions, threatening far-reaching and devastating consequences that would further undermine peace prospects and risk making Jerusalem the capital of hatred, fanaticism and violence instead of the capital of tolerance, coexistence and peace that it must be.

Meanwhile, atrocities and civilian casualties tragically continue to mount as a result of an ongoing brutal Israeli military offensive against the Palestinian people on the besieged Gaza Strip. Attacks on peaceful protesters, including children, continue to be perpetrated before the eyes of the international community. We reiterate our call on the Council to act responsibly to address the crisis and demand the lifting of the illegal Israeli blockade. It is urgent that action be taken to uphold its obligation to ensure the protection of the Palestinian people in the occupied Palestinian territory, including in East Jerusalem and the besieged Gaza Strip.

It is painful to observe millions of Palestinian refugees enduring decades of displacement and injustice as Israel continues its denial of their legitimate rights. Their situation is tragically worsening as the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) experiences an unprecedented funding crisis that is putting at risk the Agency's indispensable humanitarian and development assistance for the refugees, including its vital education, health, relief and social services

programmes, causing deep anxiety and worry and threatening further instability.

We assert, in that regard, that support for UNRWA at this difficult juncture on the part of all international actors is imperative to conveying a message of hope and collective political commitment to the rights and aspirations of Palestine refugees, so as to ensure that their growing needs are adequately met and their right to return, consistent with the relevant resolutions, in particular General Assembly resolution 194 (III), is preserved and respected.

On behalf of the OIC, I reiterate once again our collective call on the international community to render further support for the resilience of the Palestinian people and to act forthwith on the basis of our clear political, legal and moral obligations to redress their plight and enable them to achieve their rights and legitimate national aspirations, including to self-determination and the independence of their sovereign and viable State of Palestine, within the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela.

Mr. Moncada (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) (*spoke in Spanish*): It is an honour for the delegation of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela to take the floor on behalf of the 120 States members of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries at today's debate.

The situation on the ground in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, is critical and clearly unsustainable. In that regard, the States members of the Movement reiterate that the current Israeli occupation and the entire Palestinian-Israeli conflict remain a serious threat to international peace and security and require urgent attention and resolution, in accordance with international law, relevant United Nations resolutions, the Charter of the United Nations, of course, as well as the tools provided by multilateral diplomacy. The Security Council has a clear responsibility. It must uphold its obligations under the Charter and enforce its own resolutions, which are not only the basis for a peaceful, just and lasting solution to the conflict, but are legally binding on all States Members of the Organization.

We also remain committed to contributing to the achievement of a peaceful, just and lasting solution

to the conflict, as reiterated on 26 September, when the Movement's Ministerial Committee on Palestine adopted a public statement on the issue that was unanimously supported by the membership. We also take this opportunity to call for the requisite efforts to be taken and stepped up at the regional and international levels in support of such objectives, the ultimate aim of which is to end the injustice; more than 51 years of the Israeli foreign occupation of Palestine, including East Jerusalem; more than 70 years of the Nakba, which we must remember in all its human dimensions — the disaster and tragedy that befell the Palestinian people in 1948, during which they lost their homeland and the majority of Palestinians were forcibly uprooted from their homes and displaced, becoming refugees. Their suffering continues to this day.

The Movement of Non-Aligned Countries still considers resolution 2334 (2016) to be the most viable path to peace. It establishes the fundamental requirements and parameters for a just solution, through which the two-State solution would be achieved on the basis of the pre-1967 borders, in line with the relevant United Nations resolutions; the Madrid principles, including the land for peace principle; the Arab Peace Initiative and the Quartet road map, with a view to ensuring that the Palestinian people are able to enjoy their inalienable rights. The Security Council must insist that resolution 2334 (2016) be respected, in particular by the occupying Power. Similarly, the States members of the Movement reiterate their call for full respect for and the implementation of all other relevant resolutions in that regard, as they will create the necessary conditions to end the occupation, justly resolve the conflict in all its aspects, and make Palestinian-Israeli peace and security possible.

We take this opportunity to note the current deep-seated funding crisis of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) and to stress the urgency of providing UNRWA with sustained, predictable and uninterrupted support, in particular following the punitive and unjustified decision of the Government of the United States of America to end its contributions to the Agency. That not only affects the most vulnerable segment of the Palestinian population and undermines the provision of humanitarian assistance and vital development, but also threatens the stability of the entire region. Similarly, we echo UNRWA's statements in expressing concern about the recent and irresponsible announcements made by

Israeli authorities about the closure of the Agency's offices in the occupied Palestinian territory.

The situation in Gaza remains of great concern to the Movement, in particular the grave humanitarian situation that regrettably, continues to deteriorate on a daily basis. In that regard, we reiterate our call for the complete lifting of the Israeli blockade on the Gaza Strip, which continues to impose untold economic, social and humanitarian suffering on more than 2 million Palestinian children, women and men. It must be emphasized once again that the crisis in Gaza should be addressed in a comprehensive manner, in accordance with international law, including humanitarian law and human rights law, as well as the relevant United Nations resolutions.

Bearing in mind that Israel has clearly renounced its obligations as an occupying Power to protect the Palestinian civilian population, in compliance with the provisions of the Fourth Geneva Convention, the Movement calls on the international community to ensure the protection of Palestinian civilians on the Gaza Strip and throughout the entire occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, so as to address the deplorable lack of security for the occupied population and prevent the loss of more innocent lives.

In that regard, the States members of the Non-Aligned Movement reiterate their deep concern at the lack of accountability for all of the violations committed by Israel, which fosters impunity and destabilizes the situation on the ground, while reducing the prospects for peace. That is why we reiterate our call for international action, in particular that of the Security Council, in order to ensure that those responsible are brought to justice for their actions and that the violations committed by the occupying Power cease. Israel must fulfil its obligations and responsibilities within the framework of international law.

We stress that failure to provide protection to the Palestinian people will only lead to further escalation of the violence, which will result, tragically, in additional bloodshed, as demonstrated by the numerous deaths and injuries of Palestinian civilians, including children, in recent weeks. We also reiterate our concern that the Security Council has long been unable to fulfil its mandate on this very important issue because of the use of the veto by one of its permanent members.

With regard to the situation in the occupied Syrian Golan, we reaffirm that all measures and actions that

Israel, the occupying Power, has taken or may take, such as the illegal decision of 14 December 1981, which sought to change the legal status, physical character and demographic composition of the occupied Syrian Golan and its institutional structure, as well as Israeli measures to implement its jurisdiction and administration in that area, are null and void, without validity or legal effect. In that regard and in line with our principled positions, we demand once again that Israel comply with resolution 497 (1981) and withdraw completely from the occupied Syrian Golan to the lines of 4 June 1967, pursuant to resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973).

In conclusion, the Non-Aligned Movement reaffirms its permanent solidarity with the Palestinian people to promote a just, lasting, comprehensive and peaceful solution on the basis of General Assembly resolution 194 (III). We also reaffirm our support for the heroic Palestinian people in their quest for justice and for the achievement of their inalienable rights and legitimate national aspirations, including the right to self-determination, freedom and independence in their sovereign and independent State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital, on the basis of the pre-1967 borders.

The President (*spoken in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Morocco.

Mr. Atlassi (Morocco) (*spoke in Arabic*): First and foremost, I would like to congratulate you, Madam President, on your country's assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for this month. I would also like to thank you for convening this meeting on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question. I further thank Mr. Nikolay Mladenov, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Special Representative of the Secretary-General, for his valuable briefing on this topic.

I am pleased at the outset to begin my statement on an optimistic note by congratulating the Palestinian delegation on having been selected by acclamation, at the ministerial meeting of the Group of 77 in September, to preside over the Group. In addition, the Palestinian delegation was granted the necessary authorization by the General Assembly to represent the Group and speak on its behalf. We hope that that action is a positive omen for the creation of a Palestinian State, with East Jerusalem, as its capital within 4 June 1967 borders,

living side by side with Israel in peace, harmony and coexistence.

However, successive events, tensions and upheavals in the Middle East undermine our optimism. The dire circumstances facing the Palestinian question paint a grim picture. The situation in occupied Palestine is deteriorating day by day because of the Judaization, settlement and repression policies practiced systematically against the Palestinian people by the occupying Power. That will lead to an implosion and to the exacerbation of the situation. In addition, those actions pose an obstacle to easing the tension and relaunching the peace process, which has been stalled for four years.

The use of force against unarmed civilians has never led to peace, and the sustained settlement policy, in violation of United Nations resolutions, particularly Security Council resolution 2334 (2016), has never led to a resumption of the political process. On the contrary, it has been a source of provocation for Palestinians and the international community. Moreover, the lack of decent living conditions has never helped to create an atmosphere of trust or an environment conducive to relaunching the peace process.

Undermining the recognized legal and historical status of Jerusalem will only push the Palestinian question into the labyrinth of religious conflict. Jerusalem has a special place not only for the inhabitants of Jerusalem, but also for believers of the three monotheistic religions. Jerusalem is the first Qibla and the third holy place for more than 1.5 billion Muslims. The city's legal status is inviolable and cannot be modified by any means, pursuant to Security Council resolutions and the international legitimacy.

That is why the Kingdom of Morocco, whose King Mohammed VI is the President of the Al-Quds Committee, underscores the importance of safeguarding the historic, legal and political status of Jerusalem, while reminding the permanent members of the Security Council and the Quartet of their obligation to assume their responsibilities fully in order to prevent any action that could undermine the status of the city or block international efforts aimed at settling the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

His Majesty has therefore, on several occasions, called for the avoidance of any action that could modify the political status of Jerusalem, in particular because it is a final-status issue. The international

community must shoulder its full responsibilities and encourage the parties to return to the negotiating table and relaunch the peace process based on the two-State solution. Otherwise, that solution will remain empty words that can only lead to the spread of violence and hatred. That is what His Majesty said in his message to the participants in the fifth International Conference on Jerusalem, hosted in Rabat from 26 to 28 June under the theme "The Palestinian question after 50 years of occupation and 25 years of Oslo Accord". His Majesty said:

"The international community must make every effort to pool efforts in order to ensure that the fair and just settlement of the Palestinian question stays at the negotiation table in line with a realistic vision and a clear timetable, based on the existing terms of reference and where the two parties will seriously engage in it and shoulder their responsibilities.

Our support for the Palestinian question is unconditional and ongoing. That was also underlined by His Majesty in his message:

"We reiterate our commitment to the Palestinian question. Our support is continuous and absolute. It shows solidarity and an irreversible commitment until the Palestinian people are able to recover all their inalienable rights, because those rights are legitimate under international law, where land and history bear witness to that."

To conclude, the position of the Kingdom of Morocco on this conflict remains unchanged. It is based on the Arab Peace Initiative and on the principles and terms of reference with regard to achieving peace on the basis of creating an independent Palestinian State, with East Jerusalem as its capital, within the 4 June 1967 borders, living side by side with Israel in peace, security and harmony.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Cuba.

Mrs. Rodríguez Camejo (Cuba) (*spoke in Spanish*): We endorse the statement made by the representative of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries.

Cuba regrets that since, the last open debate on this issue (see S/PV.8244), there has been no progress in promoting the just cause of the Palestinian people. On the contrary, the situation on the ground continues to

deteriorate, with arbitrary decisions being made, such as one Member State's decision to stop funding the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East. It is deplorable that owing to the repeated obstruction of one of its members, the Security Council has not even condemned the escalation of violence and the tragic events in the Gaza Strip since 30 March.

Cuba reiterates in the strongest terms its rejection of Israel's use of disproportionate and indiscriminate force against Palestinian civilians in the occupied territory, including East Jerusalem and particularly the Gaza Strip, in gross and flagrant violation of the Charter of the United Nations and international humanitarian law. We once again condemn the illegal construction and expansion of Israeli settlements in the occupied Palestinian territory and the demolition and seizure of Palestinian property. All such measures, together with the blockade of the Gaza Strip, violate the Fourth Geneva Convention and erode the viability of a two-State solution. Cuba urgently reiterates its call on the Security Council to fulfil its responsibility under the Charter for the maintenance of international peace and security. The Council must demand that Israel immediately end its occupation of Palestinian territories and its aggressive colonization policies and practices, as well as abide by the relevant Security Council resolutions on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question, particularly resolution 2334 (2016).

We reiterate our unreserved support for a comprehensive, just and lasting solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, based on the establishment of two States and enabling the Palestinian people to exercise their right to self-determination and an independent and sovereign State, within in the pre-1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital, as well as the right of return of refugees. We reject the unilateral action of the United States establishing its diplomatic representation in the city of Jerusalem, which only exacerbates tensions in the region. We call for support to President Mahmoud Abbas's proposal (see S/PV.8183) to hold an international peace conference, based on agreed parameters and terms of reference. We want to express to the Palestinian Government and people our unwavering solidarity and support for Palestine's admission to the United Nations as a full Member.

Cuba once again calls for Israel's total and unconditional withdrawal from the Syrian Golan and

all occupied Arab territories. We want to point out that any measure or action designed to change the legal, physical and demographic status and institutional structure of the occupied Syrian Golan, as well as Israel's measures to exercise its jurisdiction and govern that territory, violates international law and the Charter of the United Nations.

Lastly, we call for respect for multilateralism and for the Charter. We call for an end to interference in the internal affairs of others, to foreign aggression and support for terrorist groups to promote instability and conflicts in the Middle East, as well as to the invention of pretexts and theories in the Council in an attempt to legitimize the unilateral use of force and aggression against sovereign States.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Qatar.

Ms. Al-Thani (Qatar) (*spoke in Arabic*): I would like to congratulate you, Madam President, on Bolivia's accession to the presidency of the Security Council for October, and to wish you every success in your work. We appreciate the holding of this open debate, and we thank Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General, for his comprehensive briefing. We also thank Mr. Hagai El-Ad for his participation in the meeting this morning.

The unresolved conflicts in the Middle East continue to ensure that the situation there remains critical and unstable. If we do not rely on wisdom and reason and commit to respecting international law and the Charter of the United Nations, we will put peace and security in the region in jeopardy. Those challenges require an environment conducive to addressing them, including the united efforts of all concerned to fight violent extremism and terrorism and tackle their root causes while examining their cultural, social and political backgrounds.

The Palestinian question has been on the agenda of the Security Council for decades, and yet the international community has been unable to settle it. The achievement of such a settlement would have a positive impact on the stability of the region as a whole and on international peace and security. The Palestinian question is the central issue for Arab and Islamic nations. A lasting, just and comprehensive, peace must be based on international law, the Charter of the United Nations and the principles of international legitimacy

regarding self-determination and the inadmissibility of the annexation of territory by force. That requires meaningful negotiations between the Palestinian and Israeli parties to reach agreement on issues pertaining to a final settlement, based on agreed-on terms of reference, including the Arab Peace Initiative, for the establishment of a viable Palestinian State along the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital; ending the Israeli occupation of Arab territories, including the Syrian Golan and the Lebanese occupied territory; immediately ceasing all settlement activities; on the return of refugees; acknowledging the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, and not changing the status of Al-Quds Al-Sharif and other Islamic and Christian holy sites, especially the Al-Aqsa Mosque. That would ensure that both parties could live side by side in peace and security.

The unjust blockade of Gaza has entered its eleventh year. The people of Gaza are enduring an agony of suffering from the humanitarian crisis. Based on instructions from His Highness Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani, Emir of the State of Qatar, we have provided them with \$150 million in humanitarian assistance. We have also provided the Gaza Strip with fuel for generating electricity. The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) recently celebrated the opening of the new scholastic year, and the State of Qatar has contributed \$50 million to the UNRWA educational programme, helping its schools to open on schedule. Those efforts are part of our positive role to foster the stability that peace requires.

The crisis in Syria is having serious repercussions and demands an urgent political settlement based on the Geneva communiqué (S/2012/522, annex) and the relevant Security Council resolutions, including resolution 2254 (2015), with the full participation of the Syrian people, in order to meet their legitimate aspirations while maintaining Syria's national unity, sovereignty and independence. Until a political transition and national reconciliation are achieved, there must be accountability for crimes under international law and international humanitarian law. We underscore the importance of supporting the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism to Assist in the Investigation and Prosecution of Persons Responsible for the Most Serious Crimes under International Law Committed in the Syrian Arab Republic since March 2011.

It is nearly a year and four months since the illegal blockade was imposed on my country, the State of Qatar, in a contrived crisis that seeks to control its will and invalidate its political decisions on fabricated and farcical grounds. That contrived crisis only undermines the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf (GCC). For more than three decades, that regional entity has been able to maintain its unity. In the light of the crises in the region that require collective action, we must preserve the GCC.

The countries imposing the blockade have not been successful. The State of Qatar has been able to deal with the unprecedented crisis in the Arab Gulf wisely, through an ongoing policy of openness and building bilateral and multilateral partnerships in different areas, despite the campaigns of hatred and deception by the countries of the blockade, which seek to justify their irresponsible actions against the people and residents of the State of Qatar.

Since the beginning of the crisis, the State of Qatar has underscored its commitment to dealing with it in accordance with international law and the relevant existing bilateral and international conventions and agreements on conflict resolution. The State of Qatar therefore reiterates its commitment to the mediation led by His Highness Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, Emir of the sisterly State of Kuwait. We are grateful to the States that have supported us during the mediation to resolve the crisis. We are ready to negotiate without preconditions and in full respect for our sovereignty, as we have reaffirmed time and again in various forums.

In order to find solutions to that contrived crisis, which causes legal and social problems pertaining to family fragmentation and the deprivation of students from the right to study as a result of the unilateral measures imposed by the countries of the blockade, the State of Qatar resorted to the International Court of Justice, which, on 23 July, issued a ruling by adopting provisional measures in favour of the State of Qatar against the United Arab Emirates for violating the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination. The ruling included provisions that requested the United Arab Emirates to ensure that families were reunited and that the affected Qatari students were given the right to finish their studies in the United Arab Emirates and to receive their educational records. It also gave the affected Qatari citizens access

to the judiciary in the United Arab Emirates. That proves the sound legal position of my country.

In conclusion, I would like to take this opportunity to reaffirm that the State of Qatar will continue its foreign policy based on international law, friendly relations and constructive cooperation within the multilateral system. We believe that such an approach is the best way to end all international crises, including those in the Middle East.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the Permanent Observer of the League of Arab States.

Mr. Abdelaziz (*spoke in Arabic*): This meeting is being held at a critical time. The credibility of the multilateral system is at stake, particularly that of the Security Council as it addresses flagrant violations of international legitimacy and defends the firm and established foundations of the peace process in the Middle East, which is subjected to fierce attack.

The League of Arab States warns against the grave threat to the main principles of the United Nations peace process, in particular the two-State solution, the principle of land for peace and the five final-status issues. All those principles are under fierce attack by unilateral, irresponsible decisions that seek to change the facts on the ground through unilateral actions, without negotiation, in contradiction to established international legitimacy. Such actions attempt to settle the issue of Jerusalem, the most critical final-status issue, in favour of Israel by means of an illegal acknowledgement of Jerusalem as the capital of the State of Israel and the transfer of the United States Embassy to that city. Another example is the ending of funding to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, which is an attempt to undermine the will of the defenceless Palestinian refugees to exercise their inalienable right of return to their occupied territories, while resolving the matter of the refugees, which is the second final-status issue, in favour of Israel.

That fierce attack has been exacerbated by the Israeli inhumane practices against the defenceless Palestinian demonstrators since the beginning of the Great March of Return this year, when more than 200 people were martyred and nearly 5,000 injured. Most recently, an Israeli attack claimed the lives of seven martyrs east of Bureij camp in the Gaza Strip. Such practices require decisive action by the Security Council, the Human

Rights Council and the International Criminal Court so as to end Israel's violation of its commitments as the occupying Power in line with the Charter of the United Nations, international law and international humanitarian law and human rights law.

We call on the Council to take action in order to implement the Fourth Geneva Convention and the new internationally agreed humanitarian concepts in the occupied Palestinian territory, particularly those of the responsibility to protect and human security, which are established foundations for the protection of the Palestinian people from a reckless occupying Power that violates all their rights, including their right to peacefully demonstrate against occupation.

In that regard, the recent report of the Secretary-General submitted at the request of the resumed tenth emergency special session of the General Assembly includes alternatives for action. It is a solid foundation for the Security Council to regain the initiative on that important issue and to work with the General Assembly to adopt an effective mechanism that will provide protection in all its forms: physical protection from armed aggression against the defenceless Palestinian people; legal protection in the face of the nation-State law of the Jewish people, which denies the Palestinian people any connection to their historic land; and the protection of Palestinian territory against settlements that contravene resolution 2334 (2016). Israel's action to demolish Khan Al-Ahmar village and other Bedouin communities in order to establish geographic contiguity between East Jerusalem, the capital of the State of Palestine, and the neighbouring Israeli settlements is unacceptable. Holy sites should be protected by addressing attempts by Israel to enact a law that permits Jewish worshippers to pray at the Holy Mosque, which is a flagrant violation of the status of Jerusalem as a symbol of coexistence among faiths.

There is also the issue of providing protection for the Palestinian people in Gaza against the destructive impact of Israel's blockade of the Gaza Strip, which undermines Egypt's tireless efforts to achieve the desired Palestinian reconciliation.

On 20 February, Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas presented to the Council a practical plan for peace through direct negotiations between Israel and Palestine, based on the two-State solution, the principle of land for peace, the Arab Peace Initiative and other terms of reference that would lead to the establishment

of an independent Palestinian State along the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital, before the beginning of next year. That should be achieved through negotiations on all final-status issues without exception and without biased external intervention. He reaffirmed the elements of that plan in his speech before the General Assembly at the beginning of its seventy-third session.

The League of Arab States looks forward to the Security Council and the General Assembly supporting that plan so that we see the establishment of an independent Palestinian State with East Jerusalem as its capital.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Norway.

Mr. Hattrem (Norway): I would first like to thank Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, and Mr. Hagai El-Ad, Executive Director of B'Tselem, for their contributions.

We are deeply concerned about the military escalation in Gaza. We condemn the firing of rockets from Gaza towards Israel. All the parties must show restraint and avoid provocations in order to prevent any further escalation of violence. We are also very concerned about the recent attempts we have seen to delay and undermine the speedy and unimpeded implementation of the United Nations package of humanitarian interventions to Gaza, which is important for the people of Gaza and for regional stability. Norway chaired a ministerial meeting in New York on 27 September of the international donor group to Palestine, the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee for the Coordination of the International Assistance to Palestinians (AHLC), which welcomed the United Nations humanitarian package for Gaza and called for its implementation as a matter of urgency, in coordination with the Palestinian Authority. Norway strongly supports those efforts and will provide additional assistance to the United Nations.

Gaza is on the brink of economic, humanitarian and social collapse. There is an urgent need for improved access to clean water and energy, and for job creation and the freer movement of people and goods into and out of Gaza. Norway will continue to work closely with the United Nations, the European Union and key donors to ensure the full implementation of all the elements of the humanitarian package. To succeed in those joint endeavours, we urge all the parties to

do their utmost to support the international efforts. In that regard, it is crucial for the Palestine Liberation Organization to cooperate with the United Nations and the international community.

Hamas bears a major share of the responsibility for the dire situation in Gaza and must end its provocations and politicking. It is the Palestinian Authority and the international community, not Hamas, that are providing assistance to the people of Gaza. Furthermore, the Palestinian Authority should reinstate its governance in Gaza and reunite Palestine under one authority. In the meantime, however, it is counterproductive to stop supporting Gaza financially and thereby further impoverish the population. For its part, Israel should restart fuel supplies to Gaza, expand the fishing zone and abandon its system of extensive restrictions on the movement of people and goods into and out of Gaza.

The AHLC meeting also called for urgent action to mitigate the risks to the Palestinian economy. A combination of major reductions in donor contributions, significant revenue losses due to fiscal leakage and continued restrictions on Palestinian access and movement has led to a serious decline in the Palestinian economy in 2018. There is a risk of a financial breakdown next year unless we take concerted action to address the fiscal issues, including between the Palestinian Authority and Israel. A viable Palestinian economy is a vital precondition for a two-State solution, and donors must increase their contributions. The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) remains indispensable. The Agency provides essential services to the most vulnerable Palestinian refugees and contributes to regional stability. It is vital that donors remain committed to supporting it.

Recent developments in East Jerusalem and the West Bank, including the decision to demolish the village of Khan Al-Ahmar, are very worrying. The location of Khan Al-Ahmar is strategically important to the preservation of the contiguity of a future Palestinian State. Norway has been a consistent partner in promoting peace and security in the Middle East for decades. Our long-standing commitment to helping to resolve the conflict between Israel and Palestine is based on our firm support for a negotiated two-State solution, even though today the hurdles seem more difficult to overcome than ever.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Mr. Khoshroo (Islamic Republic of Iran): I am sincerely grateful to the Bolivian presidency of the Council for convening this meeting and would like to warmly congratulate it on Bolivia's exemplary leadership of the Council. I also want to thank today's briefers.

I align myself with the statements delivered earlier by the representatives of Venezuela, on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries, and Bangladesh, on behalf of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation.

The situation in Palestine continues to deteriorate. In the wake of new Israeli crimes, the number of Palestinian protesters killed is more than 200 and the number of injured more than 22,000. Why are they protesting? They are protesting the systematic violation of their inalienable rights over the past 70 years, the occupation of their land, the decade-long inhumane siege of Gaza, the recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital by the United States, the racism shown towards them and its recent legalization in Israeli law, the demolition of their homes and the construction of Israeli settlements.

They want to return to their ancestral lands, their own homes, villages and cities, and to establish their own State with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital. But why is Israel killing them? It is killing them merely because they are Palestinians, whether they are children, women, farmers or fishermen. Because in Israel's view, Palestinians have no rights -- no right to assembly, to expression, to protest, to return, to establish their own State or even to life, and because Israel is addicted to cruelty, crime, death and destruction. With those realities before us, let us review what the Council has done to protect the rights and lives of Palestinians. During the past seven decades, it has adopted more than 300 resolutions on the Israeli-Palestinian crisis and related issues, the most recent being resolution 2334 (2016). In previous meetings, almost all Council members have said that Israel has violated that resolution. Of course, that is only one of the more than 300 Council resolutions that Israel has violated, and it is the symbol of an international outlaw.

The United States unconditionally shields Israel against any of the Council's measures. One example of that is its veto of 44 of the Council's draft resolutions

on Israel. In practice, the United States has rendered the Council completely ineffective with respect to Israel, which has therefore been emboldened to commit all four of the core international crimes, wage more than 15 wars, occupy Arab countries' territory, invade all of its neighbours without exception, attack other countries in the region and beyond and possess every kind of weapons of mass destruction. The list goes on. The question that is now before us is whether there is any option, besides taking international action, for holding both the United States and Israel accountable for all of their wrongdoing and for depriving Palestinians of their inalienable rights. That is why we believe that the world should continue to support the realization of Palestinian rights and reject any further occupation, aggression, oppression or intimidation.

In order to comply with this meeting's agenda, I have been focusing only on the question of Palestine. We will make a further statement later to respond to the irrelevant claims of the United States representative.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Maldives.

Mr. Mohamed (Maldives): I would like to thank Bolivia for convening today's open debate on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question. It has been more than half a century since the General Assembly recommended a two-State solution with clearly defined borders between the State of Palestine and Israel.

The Council, through resolutions 476 (1980) and 478 (1980) declared the Israeli occupation of Palestine to be illegal; the annexation of the holy city of Jerusalem to be illegal; and the shifting of the Israeli capital to Jerusalem to be illegal. The Council also declared it illegal for any country to recognize Jerusalem as Israel's capital, and therefore any move of its embassy to Jerusalem to be illegal. Through resolution 2334 (2016), the Council called upon Member States to distinguish, in their relevant dealings, between the territory of the State of Israel and the territories of Palestine, occupied since 1967, and reaffirmed the illegality of Israeli occupation and settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories.

And yet, the question of Palestine remains unsettled. As responsible members of the international community, all Member States, especially the key players in the conflict, must uphold the letter and spirit of relevant Council resolutions. The legitimacy of the

Council is fundamental to the credibility of the United Nations and the maintenance of international peace and security.

Just last month, Israel's High Court of Justice rejected a petition to prevent the demolition of a village in the West Bank, which would result in the displacement of hundreds of people, leaving them homeless, without a livelihood, without a school for their children and without access to basic health care.

As the people of Palestine continue to live in unjust conditions in their own homes, we have on many occasions heard the international community call upon the people of Palestine to be resilient. If we continue to merely express sentiments instead of holding accountable those responsible for multiple breaches of international law and international humanitarian law, we are masking our own failures and abandoning our own responsibility to the people we claim to help.

The Maldives has always believed that an independent State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital, based on the 1967 borders, living side by side and in peace and harmony with Israel, is the best and only solution to the conflict. We call on Israel to fully implement the Council's resolutions and to respect its legal obligations under the Charter of the United Nations. We all must act in good faith and respect the international norms that we have forged to sustain peace in the Middle East.

In Syria, we are approaching the end of the seventh year in the conflict and one of the crucial moments in Syria's north-western Idlib province, where an outbreak of conflict would result in the worst humanitarian catastrophe of this century. In such an event, more than 3 million people would be displaced with nowhere to seek shelter or find food or access health care. It is our view that all actors involved in the conflict should prioritize the fundamental human rights of the people affected over and above anything else, and to allow humanitarian relief to reach those who need it most.

The already complex conflicts in the Middle East are being worsened by terrorist groups that are inflicting destruction and tearing the social fabric of society in the process. They do not recognize borders, distinguish between young and old or women and men, or respect any religion or culture. We must tackle the factors enabling terrorism through international cooperation, information-sharing and strategies that focus on combating violent extremism.

The Security Council can and should act to address the conflicts in the Middle East. We urge the Council to use the tools and mechanisms that are already in place within the United Nations system to pursue dialogue and to resolve those conflicts. The Government and the people of the Maldives will always support a peaceful and lasting solution to the question of Palestine and the conflicts in the Middle East.

Mr. Bermúdez Álvarez (Uruguay) (*spoke in Spanish*): Uruguay attaches great importance to the various situations in the Middle East on the Council's agenda.

We thank the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, for his informative briefing and, as we have highlighted so many times, for his ongoing dedicated work. He can count on Uruguay's support.

Despite the many multilateral, regional and unilateral initiatives to try to end to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, we are still far from reaching a peaceful and mutually acceptable solution. The two-State solution remains the only viable option. There is no plan B to replace it. We must return as soon as possible to direct negotiations that can elucidate the outstanding issues. We recognize that this may take time, but it would be worse to remain bogged down in the current paralysis and stagnation. To achieve that goal, the current trends on the ground must be reversed. Otherwise, it will be extremely difficult for Palestine to consolidate its State territory.

Uruguay has strong ties of friendship with both the State of Israel and the State of Palestine. We once again reaffirm the right of Israel and Palestine to live in peace within secure and recognized borders in a spirit of renewed cooperation and free from any threat or action that undermines peace. We could dwell on the most recent events — the firing of rockets from the Gaza Strip towards Israel and the repression to which it leads or the imminent demolition of the village of Khan Al-Ahmar. We prefer instead to focus today on asking both parties to adopt measures and gestures that would help to de-escalate and alleviate tensions, albeit gradually. In Uruguay's view, such measures include the following.

First, the launching of industrial or homemade rockets from the Gaza Strip must cease, along with any action that can be deemed terrorism against Israeli targets. Second, restraint must be exercised so as to

prevent disproportionate repression of demonstrations or protests taking place in the Gaza Strip. Third, the settlement policy in the occupied Palestinian territories must be suspended because settlements are illegal under international law. Fourth, demolition orders for Palestinian homes in the West Bank and in east Jerusalem must be suspended. Fifth, the State of Israel must be fully recognized and the blockade of Gaza must end. Sixth, military and civilian prisoners or their remains must be returned to their relatives as a minimum show of humanity in the conflict. Seventh, reconciliation agreements between Fatah and Hamas must be consolidated for the sake of Palestinian unity. Eighth and no less important, beyond activism, both sides must be sensitive to the general and urgent needs of the civilian population. Palestinian and Israeli civilians are the majority and they want peace. Unfortunately, political leaders tend to lose sight of that fact. Ninth, the historical, cultural and religious heritage must be preserved in an atmosphere of coexistence. If tolerance reigns, there is room for everyone. Finally, we must work to develop the economic potential of the region and solid avenues of cooperation once the conflict is over.

In conclusion, it is time to begin to move beyond hatred and its incitement, disillusionment, despondency and frustration. Seventy years ago, the General Assembly adopted resolution 181 (II). It can be said that, thanks to the impetus provided by that international legal action emanating from this Organization, Israel and Palestine have consolidated their identity, rights and obligations as States and as recognized legal entities.

Today as 70 years ago, the international community, which was sensitive and backed that solution, is still eagerly waiting. It is harmful and unhealthy for the leaders to refuse to accept the path that the international community has selected and backed in good faith. Any territorial gain or exercise of misunderstood sovereignty is moot if it is at the expense of peace and prolongs the misery of the peoples who inhabit that region.

Before concluding, I would like to add a brief comment on Syria. Uruguay continues to support the work of the Special Envoy, Mr. Steffan de Mistura, a tireless negotiator who has acted on behalf of all of us. After so many years of a conflict of rare intensity that has brought nothing but death, physical destruction and damage to the social fabric of Syria, the least we can aspire to is the formation of a balanced, inclusive and credible constitutional committee that will lay the

foundation for a new constitution for Syria, in line with resolution 2254 (2015).

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Ecuador.

Ms. Yáñez Loza (Ecuador) (*spoke in Spanish*): First of all, my delegation aligns itself with the statement made on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries and welcomes the fact that, by a majority vote, Palestine will have the technical capacities to exercise the chairmanship of the Group of 77 and China, for the benefit of not only that consensus-seeking group but of the entire membership.

We thank you, Madam President, for convening this debate. The Security Council's regular meetings on this matter illustrates the importance of keeping this issue on the agendas of the Council and the General Assembly. It also demonstrates the importance that the international community attaches to it and the need to find solutions, for the question of Palestine is a pending responsibility of the international community.

Our delegation thanks the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, for his briefing. We commend his invaluable efforts in the work carried out with all the parties concerned, in particular with the Palestinian Authority, Egypt and Israel, to avoid escalation in Gaza, support reconciliation among Palestinians and address all humanitarian problems.

Likewise, we express our gratitude to the Secretary-General for his report entitled "Protection of the Palestinian civilian population" (A/ES-10/794), submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolution ES-10/20, of the same title and adopted by the General Assembly in June by an affirmative vote of 120 States. It is worrisome to note that the many protection initiatives that the United Nations is implementing are not enough to address the concerns regarding the protection of the Palestinian civilian population under Israeli occupation mentioned in Assembly resolution ES-10/20.

Three months ago, during the Council's third quarterly debate on this issue (see S/PV.8316), most Member States expressed deep concern about the grave situation in the Middle East — in particular in the Gaza Strip, which could result in another escalation — and about the need for preventive diplomacy and a peaceful solution to the question of Palestine, a need that Member States reaffirmed in General Assembly resolution

72/14, entitled "Peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine", which highlights the urgency of salvaging the prospects for realizing the two-State solution of Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace and security within recognized borders, based on the pre-1967 borders. In that regard, Ecuador again urges that we should make tangible progress in advancing a final and just political solution for the parties in the region, based on the existence of two States, Palestine and Israel, as the only way to achieve peace and stability in the Middle East.

A humanitarian snapshot of Palestinian victims in the besieged Gaza Strip covering the period 30 March to 4 October and published by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs asserts that Gaza

"has witnessed significant increase in Palestinian casualties in the context of mass demonstrations taking place along Israel's perimeter fence with Gaza and in the context of hostilities. The large number of casualties among unarmed Palestinian demonstrators, including a high percentage of demonstrators hit by live ammunition, has raised concerns about excessive use of force by Israeli troops."

On 2 October, Michael Lynk, an independent human rights expert and Special Rapporteur appointed by the Human Rights Council to monitor and report on the human rights situation in the occupied Palestinian territory, announced that while protests continue at the Gaza border against Israeli policies, so do deaths and injuries among Palestinian protesters, including children, by Israeli security forces. In that regard, we trust that the independent international commission of inquiry initiated in May by the Human Rights Council will be able to conduct a thorough investigation into the deaths and injuries in Gaza during the past six months.

Year after year the facts do not change: the humanitarian crisis worsens, food insecurity increases, the destruction of infrastructure continues and living conditions deteriorate. The Security Council meets routinely to gain awareness about the situation in the Middle East, including the question of Palestine. Each meeting highlights the worsening of the humanitarian situation due to violations of human rights, international humanitarian law, the Fourth Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War, and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of

the Child. Palestinian children are particularly affected by the arrests and actions to which they are subjected, in contravention of the latter. Israel's adoption of new exclusionary and discriminatory legislation and its continuation of settlement activity allow for a dangerous continuation and increase of this ever-present latent threat to international peace and security.

Ecuador once again reiterates its full adherence to the letter and spirit of the resolutions of the General Assembly that have consistently affirmed the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people and the Assembly's determination that any actions taken by Israel, the occupying Power, to impose its laws, jurisdiction and administration on the Holy City of Jerusalem are illegal, and therefore null and void and have no validity whatsoever, while also reiterating the Council's call on Israel, the occupying Power, in its resolution 1322 (2000) to abide scrupulously by its obligations and responsibilities under the Fourth Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War.

Israel's continued expansion into Palestinian territory puts at risk international peace and security as well as the two-State solution, to which the Council is committed. We reiterate that it is imperative and urgent that the Council no longer remain indifferent and that it fulfil its responsibility and work to implement the necessary measures to comply with its own resolutions.

In conclusion, Ecuador stresses the fundamental need to combat impunity for violence in time of conflict in an independent, impartial and effective manner. Even more important, however, is combating the causes of conflicts themselves, for therein lies the possibility for building genuine peace.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Iraq.

Mr. Bahr Aluloom (Iraq) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, we would like to congratulate the State of Bolivia on assuming the presidency of the Security Council for the month of October, and we thank the presidency for organizing this debate. We also thank Mr. Nickolay Mladenov for his valuable briefing.

Iraq aligns itself with the statements made on behalf of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation and the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries.

Iraq supports efforts to achieve peace and stability in the Middle East. All stakeholders must play a

constructive role in order to resolve differences through negotiations and refrain from taking any unilateral or provocative measures that lead to fuelling violence, religious intolerance and racism. Achieving peace and stability in the Middle East requires a comprehensive policy to address the political, economic and social causes of conflicts through a bold, comprehensive and diplomatic policy to avert ominous predictions of a possible catastrophe in the Middle East.

Iraq has always supported the cause of the Palestinian people and their just struggle for their legitimate rights, and we renew our consistent position vis-à-vis a just and comprehensive solution to the Palestinian question, which will be possible only through the establishment of an independent Palestinian State that enjoys full rights, with East Jerusalem as its capital, in line with the Arab Peace Initiative and international legitimacy.

We support the peace plan that President Mahmoud Abbas presented in the Security Council on 20 February (see S/PV.8183), wherein he called on international actors to establish a multilateral international mechanism under the umbrella of the United Nations to sponsor the peace process, and to convene an international conference to relaunch a credible and time-bound peace process.

We welcome the General Assembly resolution on the protection of the Palestinian civilian population (resolution ES-10/20) and the latest report (A/ES-10/794) of the Secretary-General on the subject, which includes enforceable options to protect Palestinian civilians. We urge all States and international organizations to participate in the protection of Palestinian civilians and the establishment of a practical and effective mechanism to implement the resolution.

We call on the international community and the members of the Security Council to guarantee real protection for Palestinian civilians and to implement the relevant international resolutions, in particular resolutions 605 (1987) and 904 (1994), which stipulate that the Fourth Geneva Convention is to be applied to the occupied Palestinian territory and that international protection is to be provided to the unarmed Palestinian people. We call on all States parties to the Fourth Geneva Convention to shoulder their responsibilities in honouring and implementing the Convention in the occupied State of Palestine, including East Jerusalem, by putting an end to Israeli violations of international humanitarian law and international human rights law.

We renew our call to Member States that have not yet recognized the State of Palestine with East Jerusalem as its capital to do so as soon as possible in order to invest in peace. Such a practical step would be in line with the long-standing international consensus and the declared commitment of the international community in that regard.

We would like to express our grave concern about recent developments regarding the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). We reaffirm the need to ensure the Agency's mandate. We appreciate the positions taken by the international community in support of UNRWA's work and thank the countries that have provided financial support to compensate for its deficit. We also appreciate the efforts of countries that host refugees, especially Lebanon and Jordan.

In conclusion, my Government values the efforts of the Secretary-General and Special Coordinator Nikolay Mladenov, as well as those Member States seeking to launch comprehensive and lasting peace initiatives. We urge international actors to engage in the peace talks, accelerate the peace process and remove any obstacles hindering a just and comprehensive solution.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Viet Nam.

Mr. Dang (Viet Nam): I thank the Bolivian presidency of the Security Council for convening this very important debate. I also thank Mr. Nikolay Mladenov, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, for his briefing.

Viet Nam aligns itself with the statement delivered by the representative of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries.

Viet Nam is deeply concerned about the ongoing complicated situation in the Middle East, particularly the long-protracted conflict between Israel and Palestine, and the situations in Syria, Yemen, Iraq and Afghanistan. We share other Member States' great concern regarding the escalation of tensions two days ago and the deterioration of the humanitarian and economic situation in Gaza. Cycles of negative developments have once again been hampering hopes for peaceful solutions to the conflicts in the region.

We recognize the tireless efforts of the international community, including those of the United Nations, but

we believe that much greater efforts are needed now. We therefore support all efforts by the United Nations, the Middle East Quartet, the League of Arab States and countries of the region to push forward the peace process for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict with a view to achieving a just, comprehensive and lasting solution that ensures the legitimate interests of all the parties concerned, as well as peace and security for the Middle East. Concerted actions are now needed to resume direct and constructive talks between Israel and Palestine.

Viet Nam reaffirms its unwavering support for the legitimate struggle of the Palestinian people for their inalienable rights, including the right to self-determination and the establishment of an independent and sovereign State. We firmly believe that the only viable solution is to establish a Palestinian State on the basis of the pre-1967 borders, living side by side with the Israeli State in peace, security and mutual recognition.

We urge all the parties concerned to strictly comply with international law, exercise maximum self-restraint, refrain from violence and foster a favourable environment for dialogue. We call on Israel to halt all settlement construction and take action to protect civilians and improve the living conditions of the Palestinian people in Gaza. The relevant United Nations resolutions, in particular Security Council resolutions 478 (1980) and 2334 (2016), must be fully implemented.

With regard to the Syrian situation, Viet Nam welcomes recent positive developments, including the agreement by Israel, Syria and the United Nations to reopen the Quneitra crossing in the Golan Heights and the cooperation between Jordan and Syria to reopen the Jaber-Nasib border crossing. However, we remain concerned about tensions in Syria and call upon all parties to settle disputes through peaceful means. We support efforts to find a political solution in Syria based on the fundamental principles of international laws and the Charter of the United Nations, including the principle of respect for the sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity of Syria.

The Security Council, with its primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security, should take prompt and effective action to seek peaceful and comprehensive solutions to the conflicts across the region. As a partner for sustainable peace, Viet Nam will continue its efforts to contribute to lasting peace and security in the Middle East.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Malaysia.

Mr. Aini Atan (Malaysia): At the outset, I wish to thank you, Madam President, for convening this important open debate, which allows non-members of the Security Council to express their views on an important issue that currently warrants the urgent attention of the United Nations. I also wish to thank Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, as well as Mr. Hagai El-Ad, Executive Director of B'Tselem, for their earlier briefings to the Security Council.

Malaysia associates itself with the statement delivered earlier by the representative of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries.

The situation in Palestine remains dire. A peaceful resolution to the longest man-made conflict remains elusive. Malaysia condemns, in the strongest terms, the various instances of the excessive, disproportionate and indiscriminate use of force by Israeli forces against Palestinian civilians in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem and in particular in the Gaza Strip. If left unaddressed, the growing tension in the Gaza Strip in recent weeks could certainly lead to greater chaos and turmoil in the region. In that regard, Malaysia calls on the parties concerned in the region to exercise restraint and make every effort to de-escalate tensions.

Malaysia also calls on all delegations here in the Council Chamber today, as well as the international community at large, to demand that Israel stop all violations and illegal activities and fully comply with all its obligations as prescribed by the relevant Security Council resolutions, including resolution 2334 (2016), as well as in line with international law and the Charter of the United Nations.

Malaysia is confident that States Members of the United Nations can make a significant contribution to breaking the impasse in the Middle East peace process. Malaysia continues to believe that a two-State solution, with the Palestinians and the Israelis living side by side in peace, based on the pre-1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as the capital of Palestine, is the only viable solution to this long-standing conflict.

For its part, Malaysia will continue to provide assistance to the Palestinians, within its means. We

continue to reaffirm our unwavering support for and solidarity with the Palestinian cause in materializing their right to self-determination, freedom and independence. Malaysia will work closely with the international community and multi-stakeholders in finding a peaceful, just, sustainable and lasting solution to this long-standing issue.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Oman.

Mr. Al Towaiya (Oman) (*spoke in Arabic*): First and foremost, allow me, on behalf of the Group of Arab States, to extend to you, Madam President, my sincere thanks and appreciation for having convened this important meeting. I wish also to congratulate you on having assumed the presidency of the Security Council for this month.

Although our Arab region is experiencing political crises, the Palestinian question, which has been going on for 70 years, remains the central issue in the region. Resolving it in a fair and lasting way will bring security and stability to that region.

The Charter of the United Nations prohibits and rejects the conquest of land by force. That is the principle on which the Arab countries based themselves when, during their summit held in Beirut in 2002, they adopted the Arab Peace Initiative, which is underpinned by the principle of land for peace and the withdrawal of Israel from all Arab territories occupied since 1967. In addition, the Arab countries have spared no effort in international and regional forums to mobilize support for achieving the two-State solution, within the borders of 4 June 1967, and to ensure that a just peace prevails, in which no inequitable solution is imposed on the Palestinian people, who are under the yoke of occupation.

However, Israeli intransigence, procrastination and evasion have not led to the desired solution to this issue or to ending the conflict. Israel offers only one alternative, namely, continue with the occupation, consolidate colonization and violate Palestinian sovereignty.

We reiterate that resolution 2334 (2016) represents a step in the right direction for ending the Israeli occupation and its settlement project, rejecting violence and establishing peace based on the two-State solution. That is why the international community must now undertake efforts and take the measures necessary to implement that resolution. The international

community must also bring pressure to bear on the Israeli Government to abandon its settlement project.

We underscore the Arab position calling for the full lifting of the Israeli blockade imposed on the Gaza Strip, while promptly achieving Palestinian reconciliation in line with the document signed in Cairo last year. In that connection, we reaffirm our support for the efforts of our brothers in the Arab Republic of Egypt to ensure Palestinian reconciliation.

In keeping with the provisions of international law and United Nations resolutions on the Palestinian question, the Arab Group calls on the Security Council and its member States to take the following measures: first, to not recognize any unilateral action aimed at undermining the two-State solution, including any action affecting the character, status or demographic composition of Jerusalem, and to ensure that such actions are null and void and have no legal impact; secondly, to call once again on States to refrain from setting up diplomatic missions in Jerusalem, in line with the relevant Security Council and General Assembly resolutions; thirdly, to reiterate that the questions of Jerusalem and refugees are final-status issues that must be addressed through negotiations between the parties on the basis of international legitimacy resolutions; and, fourthly, to step up international and regional efforts to bring about a just, comprehensive and lasting peace in the Middle East by creating an independent Palestinian State within the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital, in line with international legitimacy resolutions.

The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) is currently facing a critical situation. That is why I take this opportunity to highly commend the lofty humanitarian work done by UNRWA to assist more than 5.4 million Palestinian refugees, including children, women and young people, by providing relief and development services in the areas of health care, nutrition, infrastructure and education.

The Arab Group rejects any attempts to nullify the refugee issue or to remove it from the international agenda.

In conclusion, let me say that there can be no stability and peace in the region as long as the Israeli occupation of Arab territories continues. We must assist the Palestinians and save them from despair, because the international Organization is unable to end their

suffering and ensure them their rights so that they can realize their legitimate aspirations.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Costa Rica.

Mr. Carazo (Costa Rica) (*spoke in Spanish*): Madam President, we congratulate you and the Permanent Mission of the Plurinational State of Bolivia on your outstanding presidency of the Security Council during the month of October.

Millions of human beings live day by day in pain, suffering and despair as a result of armed conflict. Costa Rica strongly deplores the escalation of the conflicts in the Middle East. The situation in recent years and months has deteriorated, and it has not been possible to achieve peace and security in the region. It is urgent to put an end to the humanitarian crisis in some parts of the region and to seek an early and peaceful solution thereto. That humanitarian crisis is a tragedy of shocking proportions that represents an affront to humanity. We therefore once again call on the Security Council to fully discharge its mandate to uphold international peace and security, as clearly set out in the Charter of the United Nations.

With regard to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Costa Rica strongly supports the two-State solution, based on the 1967 borders and in line with the agreements reached by the parties. We believe that remains the only viable solution. The resolutions of the Security Council are binding and must be implemented. The implementation of resolution 2334 (2016) is key to making progress towards achieving peace.

This year has been a painful reminder of the devastating consequences of protracted conflicts. Costa Rica expresses its grave concern and condemns the escalation of tensions, clashes and, above all, deaths. Acts of violence, incitement and provocations by both sides must cease. They must meet their obligation to reverse all those negative trends on the ground in order to build trust and foster a climate conducive to peace. The protection of the civilian population is imperative.

Costa Rica reiterates its condemnation of settlement activities and land grabs, as well as announcements of new construction. All attempts must cease, including plans to demolish Khan Al-Ahmar and forcefully displace the population. Such actions, as Costa Rica sees it, are contrary to international law and undermine the solution based on the peaceful coexistence of two

States. Each new settlement that is built in the occupied territories is a new obstacle that stands in the way that leads to peace.

Allow me to refer to the protracted situation in Gaza, which has deteriorated rapidly in the past few months. Poverty and unemployment have increased. According to the report submitted to the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee for the Coordination of International Assistance to Palestinians on 27 September, poverty increased from 39 per cent in 2011 to 53 per cent in 2017. In the second quarter of 2018, the unemployment rate in the Strip exceeded 53 per cent.

We are convinced that there is a close link between the socioeconomic situation and the humanitarian reality, which is aggravated by the unprecedented funding crisis of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East. In Gaza, the Agency provides access to primary health care for 1.3 million people, access to education for more than a quarter of a million children and food assistance to almost 1 million refugees living in poverty.

It is therefore important to emphasize the commendable work being done by the Agency, and while my country is concerned about the severe financial cuts to which it has been subject, the response of the international community has been exemplary. Costa Rica applauds the ministerial meeting held in New York on 27 September, which sought to mobilize political and financial support for the Agency. Similarly, my country welcomes the support of the World Bank, the United Nations Development Programme and UN-Women, among others, which are implementing economic assistance programmes to promote employment opportunities focused mainly on women and young people in Palestine.

I conclude by urging that we put into practice the principles of multilateralism, which prioritize solidarity, peace among rivals and the commitment to achieve the interest of the entire international community. The United Nations must play its role as the epicentre of global governance, based on respect and the joint search for solutions. At this critical juncture, it is imperative to renew international and regional efforts to help the parties achieve a just, comprehensive and lasting peace based on the long-standing terms of reference endorsed by the Council. Military options are not solutions. War cannot be fought with more war. Peace must be built with the use of tools that diplomacy,

multilateralism and peace education offer us to end that humanitarian tragedy.

The President (*Spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Israel to make a further statement.

Mr. Bourgel (Israel): I have asked for the floor to comment on some of the remarks made here earlier today, and I will do my best to be brief, which I am sure that you, Madam, will appreciate after so many hours in the Chair.

With regard to the comment made by the representative of Iran, it is worthwhile to remind Member States of exactly who was talking. The Islamic Republic of Iran is the world's leading State-sponsor of terrorism. It spends approximately \$7 billion each year funding its proxies and terrorist organizations, at the expense of its own citizens. Iranian-made and Iranian-supplied weapons are fuelling conflicts and promoting terror around the world, especially in Syria, Lebanon and Yemen. Iran's activities violate multiple Security Council resolutions. Iran was also recently caught trying to murder European citizens on European soil.

When it comes to Israel, Iran's end goal is undeniable. The Supreme Leader of Iran himself set a timetable of 25 years until the destruction of my country. It is the moral obligation of the international community to take concrete actions against those who insist on fuelling violence, promoting terrorism and doing their utmost to undermine global peace and security.

It is, perhaps, a vain exercise to respond to the elucubrations of the representative of the Syrian regime. Therefore, I will just mention that his absurd accusations against Israel will certainly not distract the world from the atrocities committed by the Syrian regime against its own people.

It was probably also surprising to hear the Lebanese representative lecture Israel while Hizbullah, an internationally designated terrorist organization, plays an open, active and prominent role in the Lebanese Government. The result is that over 100,000 rockets are on the northern border of Israel, as Hizbullah's fanatics threaten the stability of the Middle East.

The President (*Spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran to make a further statement.

Mr. Al Habib (Islamic Republic of Iran): The United States has again abused this Council's agenda. It focused on Iran's children. That is not surprising. Like its addiction to imposing sanctions, America is addicted to disinformation, fabrication and deception. In doing so, it has tried to cover up its own shameless, illegal acts against the Palestinians, including recognizing Jerusalem as Israel's capital, and to distract attention from Israel's crimes, including its brutal killing of Palestinian children. But the bullets and bombs that kill them are either directly supplied or funded by the United States. Therefore, that country is an accomplice in all crimes committed by Israel.

With respect to Iranian children, the United States representative portrayed himself as more royalist than the king, but what is the truth? Hundreds of Iranian children were killed by Saddam's chemical weapons, which were directly supplied by the United States. Hundreds of Iranian children were killed by the Mujahidin-e Khalq Organization, a terrorist organization that was de-listed by America and Iran. Was the United States as its safe haven.

In 1988, the American forces in the Persian Gulf deliberately targeted an Iranian civil aircraft and killed all 290 people on board, of whom 66 were children. The United States illegal sanctions hurt and harm children more than others. That is how they help Iranian children. Recently, the International Court of Justice ordered the United States to remove all such sanctions. They must implement that ruling.

My last point is that the kingdom of terror, Saudi Arabia, is not eligible to talk about "our islands" in the Persian Gulf. Yes, it is the "Persian Gulf" and not any other fake name. Instead, the Saudis should stop exporting terrorists to Syria and elsewhere, killing Yemeni children in school buses and targeting wedding ceremonies, and end Yemen's occupation.

Last but not least, I salute Hossein Fahmideh, my hero and the hero of all Iranians, from the Council Chamber.

The meeting rose at 6.25 p.m.